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I N T H E

A I R



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LONG RANGER

To Susie
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Upon graduation from high school in 1940, I was hired as a HAND with a gold dredge company at Battle Mountain, Nevada. Several moves of the company and changing ownership placed me on the Stanislaus River east of Oakdale, Calif. as an all around dredge HAND. When the order came from Washington, D.C. that gold mining was not an essential War time activity, our source of replacement parts and steel cable was cut off forcing shut down. Our steel supplier, Hickinbotham Bros. of Stockton offered me the job of leveling the old Stockton City dump with our D-8 bulldozer and Carry-all scraper to build a ship yard. I then became crane operator and helped erect the buildings and position the steel plates for the construction of Tank-Landing craft. This story begins as I was working the night shift unloading railcars of steel plates and moving them onto the assembly ways.

W A I T I N G

"Uncle Sam Needs You". Enlistment posters seemed to be everywhere. I knew there was no way I could miss being called for service even if I wanted to. With my older brother Lloyd, a pilot in the Army Air Corps, and against his strong advice, I signed up at Stockton Army Air Base for Air Cadet Training in mid Dec. 1942. It took half a day taking written examinations covering many subjects, some way over my head and some "easy as pie" but all exciting. Next came the physical examination. The dentist reported that I needed 3 fillings and to get them from my family dentist. An appointment was made (the next day) to see my dentist. He looked at my teeth and asked "Where do they want me to put 3 fillings?" "If I grind a hole here and another over there maybe that will satisfy them". An hour later I left his office with three fillings. The only ones in my mouth. Returning to the Stockton Army Air Base the next week to continue with my physical examination, the army doctor noted that I had reported being sick as a 10 year old of what was thought to be "rheumatic fever". A second test was called for next day which included an electrocardiogram. There was a conference called of staff doctors. What a relief when the report came out "Approved for training". Back at the front desk all test papers were assembled and stacked in the "IN" basket. Away we go.

I had quit my good job at the Hickinbotham ship yard, telling them of my enlistment plans. As their first employee at the yard, I was given a big farewell by the owners and most of its workers who had come to know me by name. Now the desk sergeant announced to me; "Go back to work for two or three months. We will notify you when

there is an opening".

I was living with Mom & Dad in a large 2 story house only 6 blocks from the ship yard on the Stockton Ship channel. Hickinbothom's ship yard was the newest & completed a line of ship building enterprises lining the north bank of the channel. Next to it was a much older and larger yard owned by P.D.M. steel Co. They too had a government contract to build military transport boats but not like the "tank lighters" and barges of Hickinbothom. All of the ship yards in the area were desperate for help. On an impulse I applied for a job at PDM as crane operator listing my experience and former employer and an explanation that I was subject to call into the Air Corps. at any time. I don't think they even checked my references. Called into the interview room, the only questions they asked: "Can you read blue prints?" "When can you start?" and "Would I consider starting as a rigger foreman for craneman pay?"

Three days later I began working the largest jig-saw puzzle imaginable. The PDM contract was to assemble transport ships known as St.Louis ships (boats?) from pre-cut steel plates and parts shipped from their St. Louis ship yard. In theory these ships could be put into service in the Pacific much quicker and save the hazard of convoying them from St. Louis down the river to the Gulf and then through the Panama Canal and back up the coast. Great idea. What was not expected was the war time un-scheduled problems of railroad schedules. Keel, hull, deck, and bulkhead plates were numbered and loaded on rail cars. When five or six cars were loaded they were hooked to a train headed west, marked for PDM Stockton.

With a shortage of equipment anything with wheels under it was dragged into service. There were flat cars with rotted and missing

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floor planking, bottom dump coal and gravel cars no longer safe for mine operations, (from mines that had been forced to close by government order as "unessential to the war effort"), box cars with wrecked tops cut off to make gondolas, in fact just about anything that would roll. If a car problem sidetracked a car somewhere along the route or overworked and inexperienced railroad switchmen sent the cars to San Francisco, Sacramento, Salenas, Selma, Seattle, or Santa Cruze, those ship parts were not received with the matching parts. All construction stopped until the missing cars were located and the wayward railcars tied to another train headed for Stockton. If 4 of 6 railcars arrived in Stockton, (usual shipment), they all had to be unloaded promptly so the cars could be returned for other use. The construction ways were designed for 4 ships to be erected at the same time, 2 on each of 2 parallel launch ways. When I was introduced to the yard 4 ships had been started and all were waiting for missing parts. To further complicate things many wrong sections were welded into place because the right part could not be found. The three shifts of welders and fitters were expected to keep working. If a section didn't fit, they were supposed to make it fit. Of course that spoiled the section for its intended place and when it came time for that section to be fitted days later --- WHERE IS IT?

My first job was to climb over piles of steel, covering an area about half the size of a football field, recording and matching the section numbers of the visible or top plates with the blue prints. Some were piled upside down so that whole pile had to be turned over. It took more than a month of daylight to locate and shuffle the sections with a crawler crane and re-pile them so that the parts

could be accessed in the right order. (That is the sections that had⁴ arrived and not been used in the wrong places.) Working with the foremen and supervisors and available prints, order was approached (but never really achieved). All the while this sorting was in progress sections were being picked up by the overhead bridge crane and placed or hung for the welders and fitters to weld into place. Also new shipments were coming in to be unloaded. You can be sure the later arrivals were no longer piled on top of stacks.

It was a great day when I climbed the ladder to one of the two creaking bridge cranes and could sit on the padded (bundle of waste) seat 50 feet above the banging and flashing, waiting for a signal to bring in the next section. From the cramped 1 man control booth could be seen the activity of Hickinbothom's yard to the east and Stephan's yard to the west as well as the cargo ship activity on the old channel. Below me was the full view of workers on ladders, welders and helpers dragging hoses and cables, runners bringing fittings and bolts, and foremen studying plans and inspecting operations. Also at times there were "unexpected" activities viewed in steel compartments open only to the top. Of the hundreds of workers scattered beneath me some found it a challenge to hide in out of the way places to sleep, loaf, play or romance (yes there were some women using their talents not listed on the employment forms) without thought (or care) of looking up. This was on the day shifts. No need to guess what was happening on the night shifts and in compartments covered by deck plates.

Five hulls were launched in the two months I worked there.

O N M Y W A Y

When the call came to report for duty I was ready. I was to report to the San Francisco Ferry building with my papers and no extra clothing. The instructions called for everything to be issued "GI" upon arrival at Boot Camp and what we were wearing would be sent back home. I climbed aboard the special troop train with my one suitcase, not sure where the train was going. With the morning fog blown away, the March sun shining brightly and the spring time San Francisco temperature in the 70's, the train was ferried across the Bay, under the Bay Bridge and rolled onto the S.P. tracks at the Oakland Terminal.

I watched at the window with great interest as the train rumbled across the greening Sacramento valley to Sacramento for a brief stop. Instructions specific. Do not leave the train! It was dark before we crawled through the snow tunnels over Donner Pass. This was my first ride on a train I had watched many times from many places along the highway, so this was my opportunity to enjoy picking out familiar landmarks from the coach windows even in the dark. I didn't get much sleep but was more interested in the beautiful snow covered views passing the windows.

There were complaints from some that the steam heat was too hot in our coach. I was glad there was heat because I was not dressed for Nevada, Utah, Wyoming and Nebraska winter. Ours was not an express train so we were frequently side tracked for more important schedules. While we waited it was fun to step off for a few minutes of snowball throwing and shivering. I was glad to climb back on the train to warm my thin shoes and feet on the steam pipes

under the windows. I don't think there was an empty seat on the ⁶ train, made up of coaches and a dining car. We were assigned seat numbers and called into the mess car in order. The service and food were provided as part of the railroad transportation contract which proved to be better than what we were to get in the next training phase. The train slowed to a siding and stopped in the middle of a snow covered field in Nebraska.

The 30 deg. wind was blowing loose snow across the treeless plain from the north about 20 miles an hour with nothing to stop or slow it down but us. To the southeast about 2 miles we could see the tops of buildings in Lincoln. We were ordered to line up in a column of 2 and march (walk?)(slush?) carrying our luggage along a muddy road to a distant guard house marking an entrance to the Lincoln Army Air Base and a "reception" room for instructions.

I was not the only one wearing low shoes and no overcoat. That march from our overheated railcars through the snow and the freezing wind to our first assembly room sent more than 20 recruits to the hospital before the day ended. This began my introduction to Army Boot Camp. We were assigned squad numbers and barrack numbers. A well seasoned drill sergeant barked orders to "Fall in" and "March" to our barracks, number 911.

Still lugging our only possessions and shivering as much from the "orders" as the cold, we were dismissed at the door of one of many temporary tar-black frame building with double deck army beds lined up on either side of a 6 ft. center aisle. The floor was bare unfinished wood laid flat on the ground. The ceiling was the exposed rafters. The walls were stucco backing boards without the stucco.

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Plans may have called for stucco to be added, but the weather was too cold to apply it. There was a door at each end. In the center aisle were two cold pot-bellied coal stoves with dampered stove pipes straight through the roof, and a bucket of coal by each. Still shivering, each one looked at the others waiting for someone to start a fire.

Now it became evident that this squad of recruits from sunny California had no idea how to start a fire with frozen coal. There were many cigarette lighters but no wood in sight. In desperation one shivering recruit pulled a newspaper from his pocket and after several tries managed to get some of the coal burning. From that start we pledged to never let the fire die out. I chose an upper bunk close to a stove so it became my duty to keep fire in the stove, day and night.

To any one who has been subjected to the humiliation and planned abuse of sadistic, repeatedly de-moted non-com officers with chips on both shoulders and a razor sharp tongue, you have graduated from "BOOT CAMP". The best thing I can say about my experience was..... it only lasted 30 days. Bedding was issued the first day but not until day three was warm GI clothing issued. Some never did get shoes that fit, or at least wouldn't stop complaining about them.

Every morning there were more recruits reporting for sick call than lined up for breakfast mess call. Some were still in the hospital when we moved on.

We marched everywhere while drill instructors took their frustrations out on us. They were underpaid, (\$21/mo.?), unhappy with stateside duty, stuck in cold and mud with little chance of promotion, and they told us so. They knew we were "soon to be

airmen" (no one knew how soon) and this was their chance to try to knock us off the track. I think they were wishing we would all get stuck in the hospital and be washed out of Cadet training and maybe replace them as drill instructors. We were introduced to KP duty, which at least gave access to a warm kitchen. We were marched to the barber shop for a 2 minute "style" cut. We were marched through a clinic hallway single file with our sleeves rolled up and bare upper arms targets for loaded needles as we passed open doorways. Bugle calls woke us up, sent us to "chow", assembled us to class, inspections and the drill field.

The sun did shine but the mud and slush didn't dry up while I was there. Our cross country march with full pack sorted out a few more of the weaker "recruits". We were not even called "Privates" yet. In fact "private" is what you may be called, but PRIVATE you will never be in military training.

A detachment was assembled from the (still standing) parade ranks of recruits and ordered onto another rail coach with our GI equipment. At least we were hauled to the train station in GI trucks. I considered this a move up. This move was at night over territory I did not recognize. We were on a reasonably new coach running on a main line but still subject to frequent stops.

When we were switched off onto a make-up yard siding I could see huge cement storage silos with "Quaker Oats" painted on them. When the doors were opened we were overwhelmed by the smell of ? roasting peanuts? In the weeks to come we would know this was Oat cereal cooking and at times wished the wind was blowing the other way. This was our introduction to Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa which would be our home away from home for the next three months.

Against orders to send everything home and carry only "Government Issue" equipment, I had stuffed the Argus AF camera into my barracks bag and managed to keep it handy but out of sight. (War time secrecy rules!) I am sorry I didn't use it more but film was becoming scarce. I really didn't want to give any excuse for de-merits or "gigs". Later I was to learn that everyone was interested in buying my snapshots to send home. Then other cameras began showing up.

We were the second half of the first group of Army Students to arrive at Coe college to receive "Two years of college credit in 4 months". U.S.A.F. Cadets were required to have 2 years of college to qualify for Flight training.

The college was not quite ready for us. Our first accommodations were set up in the basement of the Gym. Double deck bunks were arranged army style at one end of the indoor competition race track. I had never seen a basement so big. The main floor of the brick building had five basketball courts side by side with room for spectators, and NO POSTS. When weather was bad we used the gym floor for drill practice. Our drill officer was soon called "Velvetone". He needed no amplifier for his loud...but smooth...voice. but could be heard and understood from any corner of the building. There was a "sub basement" below the indoor track that was used as a rifle range.

After only a few days we moved from our basement quarters into one wing of the men's dorm, "Greene Hall". I was assigned room #213 with 3 others. Again double deck bunks where single beds had been used in the dormitory rooms. The hall floors were waxed and the woodwork spotless. The ceramic tile showeres and wash rooms were

scrubbed and mirrors shining. Guess who kept them that way? Every infraction of the "Code rules" of conduct or dress was carefully recorded. Three gigs and your name was on a duty list. The angle of your cap, turning your head in formation, button not buttoned, dirt on your shoes, or wrinkle in the STIFF starched shirt or pants leg! Talking when not told to, late to formation, or not standing in perfect line (or in the wrong place), something in your mouth or not speaking your name-rank & serial number sharply or loudly when asked would call attention to you. From there the marks would multiply before the inspecting officer moved on to the next "Prospect".

There seemed to be a special delight in STIFF dress uniform. We were to look SHARP. The local laundry was constantly reminded to use more starch on shirts and pants and they were not to be folded or "bent" after pressing! Have you ever tried putting on pants without bending the legs? or buttoning a collar without bending the buttonhole? or walking downstairs (to formation line up) without bending your knees?

One time I got caught along with several others. There was a slight drizzle falling one morning when we "fell in" for morning inspection. Overcoats were ordered as dress of the day. The last recruit to hurry into position beside me started an uncontrollable laugh that tickled first one and then the others down the line. In his haste to put on his overcoat, the hanger was still curling like a question mark behind his head. The inspecting officer didn't see it from the front, or at least pretended not to so he wouldn't laugh. The gig list grew fast that morning and the Duty roster filled for the next few days. I soon learned to be an expert floor wax polisher.

As the first College Training Detachment at Coe College, there were some adjustments to the campus rules that required diplomatic negotiations. The staff included Military officers for ROTC but with our group came several new overseeing officers with objectives and ideas that were not always exactly matching the local governing board policies.

As should have been expected, the residents of "Voorhees" hall (girls dorm) across the Quadrangle were more than a little interested in the new recruits. Eligible men seemed to be in short supply after the years of draft and no military operation in the local area. They watched with interest at their open windows as we marched, ran or followed the calisthenics instructor in the playing field. In our limited free time a walk around the block (and under their windows) would elicit waves and screeching along with whistles from the excited spectators.

The Dean of Women proposed that a safety zone of 100 yards be established around her girls dorm. This would mean we could not use the city street running past the campus next to their building. Her aim was "to protect her girls". Our training director, in proper military form, let the council know his "Men" were selected mentally and physically and medical records were instantly available. Would she be prepared to furnish medical reports on her Girls?.... Our parade drill route was moved into the street past (and under) their windows.

As we began to feel more accustomed to our 7 hr. class schedule we began observing our surroundings more. One of the class buildings called "Old Main" had been used to train officers of the First World War. There was a beautiful chapel building seen behind an arched COE

~~THE~~ COLLEGE sign facing First Ave. Old Main has since been replaced with an impressive new building. The Chapel was destroyed by fire and a new one built. I think what we called the "new" building is still in use. There was another old 2 story class building of a different style between Old Main and Greene Hall that had been in use since the Civil War that has since been replaced.

The ground floor of Greene Hall's center section was the kitchen operated for us by a contractor using food furnished by the government. We were eating better and more food than was available to civilians under rationing. The dining room was the connecting section of the basement wing opposite our rooms. These were the areas we used on schedule.

We did not share classes with regular students, but were aware of them and the professors were skipping from text book to book trying to prepare us for the special Air Corps tests provided. Subjects included; physics with emphasis on hydraulics, mechanics, gases and solids, mathematics through calculus and vectors, some history and geography and geology. Besides drill periods and exercise sessions there was time set for study and a recreation period, which was like a free time.

On the teaching staff was a Regular Army Captain whose duty was ROTC direction. I never did see evidence of any ROTC students, but Capt. Vesley directed our marching. One day he asked who would be interested in forming a marching band. There were about 20 of us who met with him to ask questions. When we found this would start as a free time activity and we would need our own instruments, I sent home for my saxophone. There were to be try-outs and position assignments. Regular band music was distributed and when his baton

fell we began with rusty enthusiasm. He stopped us. Then came a firm statement I shall never forget.

"When I want a solo I'll call for it. You will not play louder than your neighbor but I want to hear you and him".

Practice started in earnest. When we finished the first piece, "Stars and Stripes Forever", he instructed

"The difference between a good band and a band is timing. Now let's play it again exactly as it is written".

In our band were some professional players who had played with and been associated with Big Name bands before entering Air Corps training. One had been with Harry James and could have been his backup. During one difficult practice session on the "Carnival of Venice" where he was playing the solo trumpet part his lip failed and the cadenza stopped. Capt. Wesley dropped his arms in disgust.

"May I use your horn please?"

Taking the horn from him we were all speechless when the Capt. finished the rendition including an extra variation of quadruple tonguing (4 notes to the beat). His instructions to the horn players was to learn to play without horn pressure on the lips if you want to play long sessions. He then gave a demonstration of bugle playing holding the trumpet to his lips with a 12" length of string. It was later learned the Capt. had been a student of John Phillip Sousa and had perfected the quadruple tonguing technique while playing with his band. Within four weeks of intensive instruction and practice we were ready for a parade down First Ave playing for the USAF-306th CTD of COE COLLEGE.

Part of our training included bus trips to Hunter Field where we took turns riding passenger in Piper Cub airplanes. This was my

first experience of feeling the fence lines 600 Ft. in the air. Iowa farmers were using crop rotation where one field grew corn while the next grew peas, beats, beans or nothing. This gave the suggestion that we were flying over a checkerboard. June heat reflected off these different crops would cause the plane to lift slightly over one and drop slightly over the next.

I didn't think to record my flying time in Piper Cubs but I was proud to stand with my first Air Corps plane for a picture to send to brother Lt. M.L.Vanciel, pilot of an Air Force O-47 plane on assignment taking aerial photos somewhere over the U.S.

Passes were available to spend time down town or off campus. The third time I was downtown and noticed the same girl at different places I began asking questions. I liked the answers and became more and more interested.

Our "final test" for PE was a scheduled 5 mile run. Well before the final test run, I had learned to run the two miles from her house to the campus, arriving just minutes before lights out. We became good friends and pen pals....But that is another story.

A I R C A D E T

July 1943 another Troop train let us off at Santa Ana Army Air Base, California as Squadron 25 qualified for Classification. With P-38s buzzing in bunches overhead and disappearing into the Wild Blue Yonder we just knew we would be up there soon. First we had to be Classified. What did that mean?

Not yet Privates we were still just recruits in line for flight training. This next month would subject us to every evaluation test the Air Force could devise. Every class room test was graded. Games were played and obstacle courses run. Rifle range practice and tests scored. Gig lists were recorded.

We were no longer in fancy college dormitories with shiny waxed hallways. The bare wood floors of these temporary two story barracks with exposed interior framing was expected to be spotless on inspection. Bunks were to be in perfect alignment with foot lockers open and every item neatly piled in its designated place. Uniforms were to be hanging "In Formation" on the rail with all hangers hooked from the front.

Shoes polished and lined up under the bunk in specific order. Bunks made up to specification and the top blanket stretched tight. A coin flipped onto the center was expected to bounce on the wool blanket.

We learned how to prevent de-merits by watching the Inspectors team approach our barracks and at the exact time skillfully sloshing a pail of steaming hot water down the aisle and quickly returning the pail to it's "FIRE" station. When the "Attention" order was called and the officer entered the doorway, we were lined up beside

our bunks and the aisle was still steaming from the required "scrubbing". I'm sure the officers were aware of our routine but as long as it worked we continued to use the fire bucket.

One series of tests can now best be described as Arcade games. In the early '40s such things as Radar and television were new and exciting. We were still in the mechanical mode. One game (test) was a phonograph turntable with a contact spot turning at the standard 78 rpm. You were to hold a pointer on the moving spot for a measured time. Simple maybe but not as easy as you think. Repeated tries sometimes scored lower than the first.

There were crossed threaded rods with exposed cranks to be turned. A Pointer was to be spotted quickly on a target by turning the cranks, one in each hand. Another test was to look through a small window and align two side by side targets by pulling strings attached to them. There were tests scores for hearing, tests for seeing and tests for coordination all compiled with the classroom scores.

It became evident that classification was established by scores. The scale was altered to meet an ever changing demand for estimated future personnel. Off the top came Pilots who would graduate as Commissioned Officers. Next came Navigators, then Bombardiers, which were to be Warrent Officers on graduation.

Below these on the scale were Flight Engineer/gunner, Radio operator/gunner and Armament/gunners.....but of course everyone was expecting to be a Fighter Pilot. This arrangement seemed to be fixed, but if more Bombardiers were needed they would be taken from the Navigators or from the Flight Engineers. Gunners were always needed and became the catch-all of training. Their training time was

much shorter than Officers.

The day came for my interview with the Training commander. With all military formality I stood "At Ease" before his desk while he studied my final scores. Looking up at me he asked

"What kind of plane would you like to fly?"

My instant reply was

"Sir, I would like to fly the largest plane available"

I had not expected his surprise.

"You must have a reason for such a request. Just why would you want to fly big planes?"

Without pause I replied,

"Sir, my experience with operating ground construction equipment such as Caterpillars, drag-lines and cranes has taught me that more and better work can be done easier with larger equipment. An operator can work himself to death with the smaller equipment and still not get the job done."

His reply dismissed me as one happy kid.

"You are the first person of this class to give me a logical reason for your request. Everyone wants to fly fighter planes and become an ace. They are all going to fly bombers but you will train for the biggest."

My parents were travelers and war time restrictions of gasoline and tire purchases with 40 mph speed limit and no night driving (blackouts) caused them much frustration. With three boys in the service and their move back to the Oakdale ranch, farm Gasoline Ration stamps were carefully saved.

With the news of me being at Santa Ana and my younger brother Brian on desert maneuvers in Southern California, a trip was planned

to visit us. In Sept, 1943 they rented a motel in Santa Ana and I was given a pass to spend a Sunday with them and show off my new USAF Cadet insignia.

They were happy for my progress and were trying to calculate just how long my training would be in the USA. We had no way of knowing but they seemed to feel I was safe as long as I was still in any of the 48 states we had toured as a family. Any state could be called Home and they still did not want any of us to leave our U.S.A. HOME.

Those of us now classified as Pilot Squadron 73 were moved into another barracks (B) and Pre-Flight classes took up most of the daily schedule with less drill but still routine inspections and evening flag ceremonies.

Shortly after the visit with my parents, on a Saturday evening, a call came through the barracks for me. I'll never be sure how he managed to get through the guard station and find me in the maze of administration, classroom, warehouse buildings and rows of barracks, carrying his full field pack.

Brian had been drafted and left home shortly before I did. After Boot Camp he was assigned to the Tank Corps. Mom and Dad had found him stationed in the California desert and told him where I was. On a week end pass from his desert station, he hitch-hiked and walked to Santa Ana A.A.Base to see me. I was glad to see him and find out what he had been doing and where he had been.

Not being too thrilled with riding in the noisy, hot "Tin Cans" he had applied for Cooks & Bakers school. (After graduation he was to again be assigned to a tank battalion for overseas duty, (ETO) as a cook.) I knew there was no way he could march through our chow

line in his dusty army fatigues but he opened his pack, pulled out his Army Ration packet and asked for some water. I did manage to bring back some of our hot food for him from the chow line. Saturday night was the only time some married cadets were allowed off base on pass so with a little persuasion the night check clerk overlooked a tired soldier, (not on his roster) sleeping on an "On pass" bunk.

The next day, Sunday, I watched as Brian caught a ride back to his temporary station with a prayer and the feeling he was prepared to take care of himself even if he was my baby brother.

Back to class. Twenty two periods of Mathematics starting with fundamentals through fractions, decimals, ratio, powers, equations, maps, scales & charts, angular measurements and vectors.. vectors.. vectors. Twenty two periods of Physics with weather, motion, energy & friction, fluids, atmospheric pressure, theory of flight, temp. & heat, moisture and gasses. Included were 9 periods of Weather (Elementary).

There were classes on gunnery with studies of sighting, harmonization, range estimates, apparent motion lighting and specific guns. Detailed study of .50 and .30 caliber machine guns, .45 caliber automatic pistol and Thompson submachine guns. There were classes on Naval Vessel identification, both US and Britishto me a boat was a boat until this study proved there were Battleships and Cruisers besides Carriers and they all had NAMES we were to identify from cut-outs. At this point in our training there was no mention of which ones were still in action or had been sunk. (Don't tell the enemy). The aim was to learn which were ours so we wouldn't try to harm our own vessels in action. Progress tests were recorded as we advanced through the mimeographed

workbooks of each class.

Final combined scores eliminated all but the top 80% from Pilot Training. This pushed some down into Navigator & Bombardier classifications which each had their percentage requirements. Alphabetical lists were put up on the bulletin board with the final scores, and the next training assignment. I found my name close to the top and was headed for Pilot training.

P R I M A R Y F L I G H T

My next move was to Twelfth Army Air Forces, Flying Training Detachment - Thunderbird II - Paradise Valley, Arizona. About one hundred fifty of us were bussed from the Phoenix train station to Paradise Valley to learn to fly. The road took us out of the Phoenix residential area to a large flat valley through fenced cattle pastures to a recently constructed complex of low buildings connected by covered walkways and wide overhanging roofs. The square control tower room with its drooping wind sock was the tallest structure, only one level above the hanger group of low buildings. A short walk brought you to the main buildings which surrounded a cool (?) swimming pool and the central Flag pole. The valley floor was as level as a dry lake. The surrounding low mountains attracted your eyes to Camelback Mountain easily seen through the clear October sky.

We soon learned that the administrative officers were not inclined to allow us any relaxation on this Thunderbird auxiliary training base. Every prior procedure and rule of living quarters and conduct was enforced. One rule was added that became quickly accepted. The low buildings had cement floors only inches above the surrounding landscape.

People were newcomers to the area and the local inhabitants still considered this their home. Spiders, beetles, lizards and harmless snakes found cool resting places in and under foot lockers, barracks bags, wardrobe closets and shoes neatly lined up under our bunks. New Rule.... Look before you reach and DUMP your shoes before putting them on!

The training detachment was divided into four squadrons for training so while one was studying in ground school classes, another was on the flight line, another on the exercise field and another squadron learning Army discipline and drill. All squadrons formed twice daily and marched to their position on the four sides of the Flag pole for raising and lowering the Flag. Special announcements, orders or citations were part of the daily ceremonies. Sundays were "free" time for instructors and staff but "catch up" time for us.

Ground school was intensive and introduced us to Link Trainers. Radio navigation and instrument flying were learned and practiced in a closed "cockpit" swiveling 4 feet above the floor while cords and hoses moved an oversize "mouse" over a map leaving a trail of your simulated flight path. Altitudes and speeds as well as direction were recorded and determined test scores. The tipping and turning of the trainer gave the feel of actually sitting in a plane. Flight programs now popular on computers add breathtaking views of scenery through windows but lack the "seat of the pants" feeling of real flying you tend to rely on.

The exercise period included baseball, basketball, volley ball and limited football games. Obstacle courses with walls to scale, pits to jump, mesh wire covered 14" crawl "tunnels", ropes to climb and then an all out race to the finish.

Formation calisthenics in the hot Arizona sun became a real challenge. Our eager director, on an elevated platform barked the directions and demonstrated the next exercise. Everyone was to count at the top of his voice while going through the motions. Monitors moving through the formation were to report or encourage (call attention to) any not "sounding off". Weaker Cadets were

called out and assembled for an escorted run around the Air strip. Each exercise was continued until only about half could still keep up. Then a brief pause for instructions and another exercise was begun. About 20 minutes of this routine gave us a 4 min. break.

Before our drooping eyes the director jumped up on the stand and began the next series of jumps, stretches, push-ups and twists, all by the numbers and the often repeated admonition "YOU'LL COUNT!" After weeks of this schedule we were all determined to keep up with this energetic "old guy" (to us) director who was still going strong when we were ready to drop.

There were mixed emotions when one day we saw double. This director, at break time was trading places with his twin brother resting under the cool platform.

Chow time was remembered as a welcome relief from the rushed schedule. After the first few weeks it became evident that the contracted food suppliers were following a pre-arranged diet program. There was a growing undercurrent of complaint among the troupes. The food was excellent...what there was of it. Our appetites were growing but the carefully measured food portions remained the same. The civilian servers were not allowed to deposit two scoops of anything on our tray and the order was NO seconds. On the bulletin board was posted a detailed menu for each day of the coming week which would have attracted most any gourmet, with no mention of the limited portions.

The November week of Thanksgiving listed Roast turkey with dressing, mashed potatoes with gravy, cranberrys and mixed salad, diner rolls, coffee, milk and pumpkin pie with ice cream, for Thursday. From past experience we assumed there would be a spoonful

of each. I'll never forget that meal. All restrictions were off. Our trays were loaded when we sat down to eat. The announcement was made that seconds were waiting. I joined several others in a run around the buildings before going through the line a second time. Some may have gone back for thirds but I was stuffed with seconds. Everyones pushup scores suffered next day and measured food portions were again enforced.

Before leaving the ground for the "Wild blue yonder" the first order was always a visit to the Flight Surgeon for a Pre-Flight Physical Exam. Routine vision, hearing, strength, coordination, lungs and heart; my tests were all good. Then the Dr. called me back for an EKG. test. With this "normal" recorded chart before him, I was certified for flight.

We were divided into groups of 5 for each Flight Instructor. I can't help looking back on these dedicated veterans of air history and wondering how many times they wanted to turn their "Plow jocky" students into foot soldiers. The instructor walked us around the plane, pointing out each part and what it was called, from the tail wheel to the engine and gas tank in the upper wing and emphasizing the marked areas of "Step" and "Hand Hold" and "Do not Push".

These were Stearman, PT-17, Bi-planes with Se-L, 220 H.P engines. These could well have been used as early US Mail planes or at least WW-1 trainers, with perhaps newer and larger engines installed. Constucted of fabric stretched over a tubular metal and/or wood framework, the design has changed very little through the years. The next time you see a bi-plane flying low over a field spreading seed or chemicals, it could be one of those planes reconstructed and re-powered with a load tank and spray equipment fitted.

Each student was instructed how to climb into the open cockpit and the instruments were pointed out, the throttle control, rudder pedals, control "Stick", seat belts, mag switch, trim adjustments, fuel gage in the upper wing and the "Speaker tube" between the front and rear cockpits.

Then came the engine starting demonstration that required someone in the cockpit at the controls holding the stick back and brakes on. Chocks were firmly set against the landing wheels. At each wingtip was someone gripping a handhold. The command was shouted "Switch off" and repeated by the one in the cockpit. The propeller was "Pulled through" at least three revolutions.

Standing on the lower wing a two man crank was inserted into the left side of the engine cowling and with all their strength a heavy flywheel was set to spinning. When it was up to speed, (as fast as you could turn the crank) and the sound almost as loud as a siren, the crank was removed for storage in the baggage compartment and the two men stood clear. With an "All Clear" shout and a quick look out both sides of the plane the "Starter" was engaged.

If the switches were "On", the throttle set properly and the fuel turned on (and the engine wasn't too cold), the prop would turn three or four times and "Catch" with a cackle and respond to the throttle. I don't know how many planes there were at this field but there were several rows lined up at the flight line; maybe thirty or more.

While they were all certified as "Air worthy" and "Arobatic" some did not cooperate as well in starting as others. It might take three or four "Wind-ups" to get some started. It was rumored that the planes used in Navy training used "Shot gun" starters in place

of our hand cranked "Inertia" starters. Those had a chamber to insert a starting "shell" that forced the engine to turn two or three times when fired.

There were times that, in the excitement of the moment, the crank was not stowed in its place after startup and the next pilot had to borrow from another plane. This could get you into a lot of trouble if you were taxiing half way across the field and the engine stopped. There was no radio to call for help.

As long as we had the crank, we learned later how to start the engine without extra help, but it was tricky and not a recommended or an authorized procedure. (It certainly wasn't done on the flight line or in sight of the tower or another plane.)

Each student was given an orientation ride, taxiing out on the field and taking off for a few turns around the flight pattern and back in to the flight line to give your seat to the next student.

The "Air strip" was not a strip at all but an "Air field" one mile square with the hanger buildings and flight line centered on the south side. This allowed take-offs and landings, on the dirt, in any direction the wind chose. There were a few markers to indicate lanes and a direction arrow to show the direction of traffic but generally everyone was on his own and had to look out for other planes and what they were doing. There was plenty of room for one instructor to be using the north side of the field while others were using the center or the south side at the same time. It was almost like learning to drive on a dirt (sandy) football field. There wasn't anything to hit except another plane and that was a big NO-NO.

October 5, 1943 I went up with Instructor Spotswood for my first

ground marker came up; the turn onto the cross wind leg of the pattern that called for reduced speed, and dropped down for the final turn onto the landing approach.

I was determined to land on the mark. I was close enough to taxi up beside the Commander, watching and waiting with his parachute. He climbed in and said "Take me back to the flight line". As I taxied up to the line, he instructed me to go back out and "Shoot two more landings" while he walked into the ready room to write up his report.

I was to have two more check rides with him before "Graduation". Sixty five hours of air time were recorded. Twenty nine were with the instructors and thirty six were solo in the "Carnival stunt plane". We learned hanging stalls, hammer head stalls, spins, loops, upside down flying, (until the carburetor ran out of gas), tight turns, power on and power off dives, spiral climbs, straight and level with nose up or down, pylon figure eights, side slips and (off the record) cattle herding.

Each plane had a large number painted on both sides and under the wing. Local ranchers wasted no time in calling numbers to the air field when a roaring plane was spotted ten feet above his field of cattle, aimed at his hay stack or barn. When the identified plane came down at the end of his "Practice" period, the pilot was grounded and his next lesson included one or more timed runs around the air field...four miles.

There were other FUN things to do that didn't trigger phone calls. One was climbing as high as practical and tossing out rolls of toilet paper. As they streamed earthward in the clear sky, the object of the game was to see how many times you could cut the paper

ride in the front cockpit. Following instructions piped through the speaking tube, I took the stick and tried climbing, turning and diving. With the roar of the engine and the smell of the exhaust, the wind in my goggled face and sun shining off the waxed wing coverings I began to understand why pilots would rather fly than eat. With my hand and feet resting lightly on the controls, he entered the landing pattern and turned into a three point west to east landing and taxied unto a parking stall. The next student was ready for his ride. In my log book I recorded Dual Time :45 plane #322.

Six one hour flights later, on Oct 13 Mr Piggott, our Squadron Commander was to be my instructor (checkride). I took off in the rear seat of #349 following his instructions and leveled off at nine hundred feet. He instructed me to cut back power and lower to 800 feet at landing approach speed and stall at 800 ft. After the third time, the instructor said now let's go down and do the same thing in the ground. When the wheels touched down on the dirt I realized he hadn't had his hand on the stick at any time. He told me to taxi to a marker where he climbed out with instructions to take off, circle the field once and come back for him.

Back at the take-off point, I went through the checklist, ran the engine up and checked both Mags, looked all around (and up) and headed down the field full throttle. With the tail up and the air speed indicator wavering over the green background. I was off for the sky ALL BY MYSELF on my first SOLO flight. Leveling off at 500 ft, a 90 deg turn to the right and then another turn over the corner ground marker gave me a chance to view the entire valley. The control tower passed under my right wing and as the next corner

with the plane wings before the ground came too close. If there was a record kept, I doubt it was advertised..... or verified.

A new dimension was added to flying Nov 18 when Mr Spotswood and I took off on my first cross country flight. As always the cockpit check list included oil and gas tanks checked but this time they were filled to the top. Our destination was Casa Grande plotted on our air chart. The weather was reported clear with a slight West wind. This was my first time to identify towns and cross roads from the air and I really enjoyed watching the roads pass under the plane. As the designated landing strip was identified and circled I could see no activity and only a few buildings beside the runway. I landed and taxied up to the buildings.

The instructor killed the engine and we climbed out for an investigation of the "Facilities". The one hour and a half sitting in the open cockpit was the longest single time I had flown to this time. We used the "Facilities" and with him in the front (passenger) cockpit I strained at the crank.

Thinking of an old time cream separator, I churned the engine back to life. With the crank properly stowed, I buckled up in the rear seat, sitting on my attached parachute which was the only cushioning on the truly bucket seats designed to hold them.

On the return flight to Thunderbird II there was time to think that now I was getting somewhere. Up to this time all my flying had been around "the nest". This was the first time I had "gone" somewhere...actually flown from one place and landed at another. To me this is still a most important factor in my love of flying. On Nov. 25, 1943 I flew the same course to Casa Grande solo. I needn't mention the engine was not killed this time.

In my spare time at Thunderbird II, I was taking pictures whenever there was an opportunity. I broke the standing rule of not volunteering for anything, and found myself listed as Assistant Photographer on the staff of the Class Book published as "Lazy Eight" by the class of 44-D. This title gave me access to some areas, not open to the other cadets, for pictures and a chance to use some Air Corps equipment not available to everyone. Those who purchased and still have copies of this book can treasure the memories by studying the faces and names recorded there. My files hold many pictures that were not published.

I did not mention earlier that there were commissioned officers attending our classes along with us. They were not required to attend all classes but were there to learn to be Pilots, along with us. They were adding to their previous military training and experiences and would return to their outfits with "Pilot" ratings. I think most of them were married and lived off base with their wives.

The end of November finished our time at Basic with a Military graduation ceremony and a party at a downtown Hotel. Once more aboard a train, we headed for California again, not knowing for sure where we were going.

B A S I C F L I G H T

The train wound its way from Phoenix over the Tehachapi Mountain pass and onto the San Joaquin Valley floor at Bakersfield and north to Fresno. USAF buses were waiting for us at the depot to take us to the Lemoore Army Air Field west of the station. This was like coming from a country club to a factory. Not as large as the Santa Ana complex, it was large enough to keep us moving from barracks to training areas and flight line on the double. About 500 Cadets at a time came from 4 Primary schools. Some were from Santa Maria where they had trained in low-wing Ryan (Tin and wire) planes. Some were from Dos Rios; some from Tulare, and us from Thunderbird. Our squadrons and classes were getting larger as the graduating Cadets were coming together. Every group had drop-outs along the way; some just couldn't "get the hang" of flying; or just couldn't keep up with the classes or schedule or broke an arm or leg and were held back to the next class.

Almost the first requirement on arriving was the visit to the Flight Surgeon for the Pre-Flight Physical. I was beginning to expect the call back for an extra EKG, and another recorded tape was added to my Medical File that matched the others before the final OK was given. Next a trip to the dentist, along with (all?) the others, to remove my upper wisdom teeth. Explanation; to prevent high altitude damage to the ear drums. This was to give room for the changing air pressure to equalize. I was in the chair, and the dentist was on my chest with the forcips clamped firmly on the first tooth. I thought he was going to turn me inside out before he showed me the tooth. With my mouth still held open, he grabbed the other one and wrenched

it free, then held it up for the other dentists to see and said

"These teeth should be on display as perfect models". He didn't offer to let me keep them.

Ground school classes now included radio operation and procedures. All had to learn code and pass a test of sending and receiving at least 8 words per min. I had a head start on this class. Knowing before I signed up for Cadet training that this was going to be a requirement, I had spent time at home learning and practicing (...---...) The 8 words per min. seemed s l o w by test time.

Weather classes at the Lemoore location gave us words to describe what we were seeing in the sky daily. We had Dec. and Jan. morning and evening fog, cumulo, nimbus, cerrus, stratus clouds and clear skys. We understood why Lemoore Field was chosen for our training. Often the whole valley from Mt. Diablo to the Grapevine would be covered with fog and the only ground in sight would be our landing field. There were times we were allowed to fly when other fields were closed. but we were also on the alert to "get down" before the coastal winds drifted the fog over our "Hole".

PE classes were regularly scheduled and reluctantly attended. There was a Gym for indoor basketball and formation excercise. "Don't cheat your muscles". became a new motto.

Our Flight instructors were now Officers, each with 4 to 6 students. In turn each student would be given a check out ride in the USAF BT-15. These aluminum and plexiglass planes had a seat for the pilot with all instruments and controls, and a second seat with duplicate instruments and controls behind the first. These were covered by a sliding plexiglass canopy, (greenhouse) all above a

shining aluminum wing and behind a 450 Horse Power engine.

Not only did we now have twice the power as the Stearman biplanes. (and more weight) there was also a variable pitch prop that can best be described as an automatic transmission. It was not automatic in selection of settings. This was controlled by the pilot, so now we had not only throttle but prop pitch to adjust.

Also a new experience was wing flaps to increase lift...at the expense of speed...and electric starter for the engine. Not all the training planes were certified for aerobatics. Some had outlived this feature, as determined by the safety inspectors. In fact one characteristic we soon discovered was when power stalls were approached....full power climb....in the Stearman the plane shuddered and shook before falling over; in these BT-15s the plane shuddered and rattled as if every rivet and panel was loose..(which they probably were).

As I look back on these experiences, I can't help thinking how much our lives depended on the unsung mechanics that patched the patches on those often mis-treated and abused planes.

No time was lost getting us into the air. I was turned loose the first day after a few dual take offs and landings and then headed for the assigned practice area to give room for the others to practice on the runway. These practice areas were marked on our air chart and could be anywhere between Hy.99 and the coastal mountains from Bakersfield to Fresno. There were landing strips at Coalinga and Avenal used for practice landings and to serve as emergency fields if, for some reason, Lemoore could not be reached.

After 28 hrs dual flying time and 37 hrs solo time in the BT-15s the squadrons were rearranged and divided into single engine

(fighters) and twin engine (bombers). This meant learning to fly and checking out in the AT-17 Cessna twin engine planes. The two 225 Hp. engines, had (non-adjustable) wood props.

There were many instances when these propellers were "adjusted". The main wheels were made to retract -- almost -- into the engine housings to gain cruising speed and for most flying excercises. We now had to learn to put the wheels down for landing, as well as adjust the flap lever.

Between the side by side pilots seats was a crank and bicycle chain that screwed the wheels up or down. There was a red light on the instrument panel and a horn that sounded over your head when landing air speed was reached.....if the wheels were not all the way down. When a (confused) pilot -- concentrating on lineing up with the runway and trying to land on the line -- forgot to crank the wheels down, the spinning props could be shortened by several inches QUICKLY.

From the flight line on one occasion I watched a student come in with his wheels up and the landing was so smooth that the spinning props never touched the ground. With only 2" clearance this proved that it could be done. His penalty; jacking the plane up with ground jacks, by hand, until the gear could be extended, and "grounding" (no flying) for two days.

Splintered props usually led to "Wash Out," If the landing was on the Lemoore Air strip, the control tower would usually be screaming into the headphones "WHEELS" --- "GO AROUND AGAIN". If the pilot used the classic excuse "The Horn was making so much noise, I couldn't think!" he probably didn't have his headphones over his ears either (another NO-NO).

Passes were available on weekends if there weren't any demerits or gigs or repeat assignments after your name. There was an Air Field bus to downtown Fresno and return but I really wasn't too interested in the usual weekend activities. They were not too different from those available on the Base, (and cost a lot more.) With a weekend pass beginning at 17:00 one Friday night I decided to go home. (Oakdale). The bus to Fresno didn't leave the Base until 18:30 so I started hitch-hicking. A farmer picked me up at the gate and drove about 8 miles - to his farm. After about a mile of walking another car stopped for me and took me to Hy 99, the city limits of Fresno.

In Jan. 1944, Hy 99 had progressed from a connection of a lot of 2 lane roads to become the "Back Bone" of California carrying all ground transportation from Southern California to Oregon. Side by side the Railroad and "The road" joined the valley towns and prospering cities collecting produce for export and bringing people and merchandise.

I have no way of knowing how many times I had traveled from Pasadena to Stockton over this "Beaten Path" riding in many different "Automobiles". The war time restrictions on gasoline, tires and speed limits had (I was soon to learn) all but eliminated the through automobile travelers, at least at night time.

With Fresno as a logical midpoint on the North South route, Texaco had built a new Service Station, with a radical approach, called a "Truck Stop" on the highway with rows of diesel pumps and rows of gasoline pumps spaced wide apart for truck service and cars, all covered by a metal roof - and to be open 24 hrs every day.

It was dark when I walked up to the only truck driver metering

diesel into the tank of a loaded 1936 KW truck. I told him I was going home on pass and asked if I could ride north with him as far as Modesto. He was glad to have someone in uniform ride with him but apologized for no rider seat in the cab. He did have a tool box that served the purpose.

The floor was covered with tire and load chains that seemed to gravitate to the oversize openings cut out of the wood for the brake and gearshift levers. We stoped three or four times for coffee and to check the load as well as try to warm up.

There was no heater and the doors (and windows) didn't fit the openings too well. At the top speed of 40 MPH the only heat was from the oil-leaking engine, bringing with it the strong smell of hot oil and diesel through the loose floor boards. The "fresh air" from the leaking doors and windows was welcome, even if it was cold.

It was almost 1:00 AM Saturday morning when I walked into the Bus Depot in Modesto to check on any schedule to Oakdale. Nothing till noon. When Mom and Dad had moved from Stockton back to the home ranch at Oakdale, they could not get back on the telephone (8 party line) so there was no way I could let them know where I was or that I was coming home.

I decided to try and beat the bus schedule by walking the 18 miles. I had ridden my selfmade scooter (with the Maytag engine) the trip several times while in high school. With the help of 2 short rides I got to Oakdale about 2:30 AM, in time to catch a ride with the Milk Producer Association truck driver. His regular morning route to collect the farmers' 10 gal. milk cans took me the long way around through Orange Blossom to Knights Ferry and then back past Wild Cat Canyon and the home ranch on the way back to Oakdale.

In some places there were three pickups in less than a mile, driving into driveways and lanes to wherever the cans were assembled. The empty cans were set off for the next day and full cans were swung up on the deck and pushed into place with a chain snapped between the side stakes. The clanging and banging seemed almost intentional as if to tell the ranchers, and everyone, he was on the job. It was about 6:00 AM Saturday morning when I woke my astonished parents.

This was not the first, nor would it be the last, time their kids would surprise them. There are always questions unanswered in letters and it is easy to assume meaning, of well intentioned statements, that may not always be the exact fact. Now, as then, our newspapers prove this fact in every issue. Our short time together cleared up a lot of questions about my activities, and theirs, that were not (or could not) understandably be written in letters.

Under the heading of "Now it can be told", I learned of Lloyds' (Pilot brother) flying an AAF. O-47 Recon. Photo plane over the ranch and taking a series of detailed pictures from Modesto to Knights Ferry. (The gold dredge activity MIGHT uncover some enemy action?) He then landed the plane in the field and taxied up to the house for a short visit to the amazed folks standing by the fence.

They had been alerted by the roar of the low-flying plane, as had neighbors for miles around. Of course some jumped to the conclusion that the plane had crashed and dropped everything to hurry over to see what happened. Lloyd was quick to explain that he had a fuel problem, and needed to "set down" to correct it. This report became official in the Air Force record and our "field" was then listed as a safe "Emergency Landing Field".

Local news like this surely could have been front page for the "Oakdale Leader" but they may have considered it best to file it as "Aiding the enemy" information.

The neighbors were treated to a personal Air Show as Lloyd taxied into position and roared down the cow pasture, over the squirrel holes, with the dust flying, and lifted up over the barbed wire fence at the lower end of the field. After circling overhead several times, he flew off into the blue as the spectators stood looking up with wonderment, and I think some pride.

After a good nights rest and some good "home cookin" we filled the car with gas (farm tractor gas) and enjoyed a Sunday afternoon ride to Fresno and Lemoore. They told me what they knew of Brians' movements and I told them of his surprise visit with me at Santa Ana.

Lloyd was soon to be assigned to a B-25 Group as a Flying Ground Engineering Officer which was really the inspecting mechanic for all his Group planes. Until his signature was on the "Ready" sheet for any plane, it could not be flown. Of course this required him to be the Test Pilot after any repairs or changes. This dual rating almost doubled his pay, but more than doubled his responsibility. It also would require him to fly to many distant supply depots for emergency parts when necessary.

As they headed back home, we were all wondering when we would be together again as a family. I returned to my flying and school schedule, which also now included a "position ?" on the Class Book Staff. "Passing Light" Lemoore Army Air Field Class 44-D. The photo dark room included the largest enlarger I had ever seen. With the enlarger head raised to the ceiling, an 8x10" negative could be

enlarged to cover a 6x6 ft. print at floor level. With large format cameras, and Air Corps. film we took pictures of 10 to 12 students at a time, standing in formation, and assembled them by squadrons for the book. We built an impressive file of base pictures and had to decide which ones to include for the book. The printers did a beautiful job printing our black and white pictures.

On Jan 27, 1944 we flew our assigned cross country flight to Allen field - Porterville, Madera, Coalinga and back to Lemoore. With the Check Pilot, Capt. Jones, in the right seat (copilot) and three other students in the rear seat, we each took our turn in the Pilot (left) seat to pass our Basic Twin Engine Flying School training. On the bulletin board three days later was posted the list of GRADUATES and their next base assignments.

In true military form, the names were listed in alphabetical order. I had become accustomed to this arrangement but this was the first time I felt an injustice forced on me because of my name. The graduating class was TOO large for all to be sent to Advanced training at La Junta, Colorado to train in B-25s.

A line was drawn 4 students above my name. Those 4 were to be sent to STOCKTON for Advanced training. My name and 5 below me were assigned to PECOS, Texas.

When I found out that one of the 4 fellows above me was from New Jersey, I tried to switch places with him, and almost talked him into going with me to the Operations Officer --- then word spread that Stockton was a Country Club and everyone should want to go there. That shot my chance of flying at HOME.

A D V A N C E D F L I G H T

Travel orders in hand, six U.S. Army Air Cadets with all our baggage, boarded the San Joaquin Daylight train at Fresno about 16:00 (behind schedule) with instructions to purchase our own tickets at Los Angeles for the trip to Pecos, Texas. The re-arranged school list had not allowed time to secure advanced reservations for us.

This was my first ride on the "Daylight" which was advertised as --- San Francisco to Los Angeles in one day. We pulled into the Los Angeles depot about 10:00 the next morning; 18 hours from Fresno. If the train didn't stop for mail or passengers at every town, it was stopping for milk cans at each road crossing.

We elbowed our way through the crowded platform to the ticket counter line. When we asked for tickets to Pecos, we were told the next train would leave at 2:00. (14:00) There was really no need to ask when it would get there. We signed vouchers for the tickets and checked our baggage. This left us about three hours to eat, shop and sightsee downtown Los Angeles.

Now for any who are not familiar with the old LA train depot, it should be stated that it did not (does not) present a very desirable impression of Southern California. Walking the dirty streets for several blocks around, I found a hardware store about 4 blocks away to look through and noticed a new GE portable radio in the window. The size attracted my attention; hardly as big as a lunch box, and I asked about it. The clerk told me it was a new model he had just received, but that there were no tubes delivered with it, and he didn't carry tubes to fit it. He suggested I should be able to get

the 5 tubes from Army supplies. All new radio tubes were on the "critical" list and not available to "civilians". After a negotiated price of \$8.00 (half the marked price) I went on my way with a new toy.

At 14:00 we were on the crowded train and found seats. It was after 14:30 when the train steamed out of the depot. I didn't record the name of this Atchison-Topika-&-Santa Fe train but at least it only stopped at towns, not cross roads, and the distance between towns grew steadily greater as we crawled east over the mountains and desert.

The third night on the train the conductor called out "PECOS next stop" at 2:00 AM. The six of us stepped off the train and walked the few yards to the empty waiting room. The lone ticket agent was surprised to see us and asked if he could help us. We showed him our orders and he offered to call the Flying Field for instructions.

It was over an hour later that an Army Truck pulled into the parking lot for us. Not only were our ticket reservations not made from Lemoore, but Pecos had not been notified of our coming. Next morning we were told classes had started two days before and we would have to catch up the best way we could. They didn't seem too happy to have us; however---

When the flying instructors learned they were to have 6 extra students already trained in AT-17s to divide between them, THEY all welcomed us with open arms; in fact they almost started a fight over who was going to get us for their student.

The first day we were issued parachutes and reported to the flight in groups of six. (I was number seven in my group). My

instructor introduced himself to us and gave his usual description of the planes we were to fly, the rules to be followed and what he expected of his students. Passing out a printed booklet to each, he advised memorizing the contents. Turning to me, he asked me to follow him.

We walked out to the flight line and "pre-flight" inspected a UC-78 Cessna (the same AT-17 plane I had been flying at Lemoore). He strapped himself into the Co-pilots seat and instructed me to sit in the Pilot seat.

"Show me what you can do with this plane."

I went through the check list, called the tower for instructions and taxied out to the runway. After checking both engines, I lined up, roared down the runway, cranked up the landing gear, repositioned the flaps and entered the traffic pattern. He called out an altitude and had me make a few turns around the sunburned field.

"OK-- Can you land it?"

Swinging around into the landing pattern, I called the tower, lowered the wheels, shifted the flap lever to "Full" and came in almost on the spot. I parked the plane and as we were walking back to the others, he said

"You are now an instructor!"

I learned a lot about student pilots during the next three months and how frustrating it can be for an instructor. With the exception of the six of us from Lemoore, the others had not flown in twin engine planes. There were those who were still brooding because they wanted to fly HOT fighter planes. Some seemed to learn landings & take offs after only three or four tries.

When I thought they could qualify, I would turn them over to my Instructor for check out. Then I would have to sit through their air maneuver practice. It seemed some would never learn to get both engines running at the same speed. This could only be done by listening to the propeller sound..... maybe offbeat music was what they liked. Flaps and landing gear seemed to catch a lot of them, but this would be required operation on any military plane.

One of the others from Lemoore liked to smoke (or hold in his mouth) a pipe to calm his nerves? He learned NOT to have it between his teeth when one of his "students" stalled the plane 6 ft above the runway on a practice landing. (Broke two teeth.... and the pipe stem).

Most of the air time was spent in holding headings and altitude with timed turns and air speed. There was some formation flying, but the part I liked best was emergency procedures. With a student concentrating on his air speed and altitude, I would roll in a little extra trim tab. This would start him fighting the controls. The plane could actually be flown entirely with the trim tabs, and with them properly set the plane would fly itself, hands off.

Another lesson was to turn off fuel to one engine and see how long it took the student to find out what was wrong and turn it back on. There were practice maneuvers with one engine shut off, and then starting the engine in the air with the propeller.

One warm afternoon a student was doing real well so I asked him to see how high he could get the plane. With full throttle we headed up. Now remember these are not Jet planes! They are wood and fabric enclosed 5 place planes that have been parked in the 100+deg. Texas sun; or drenching rain with winds up to 50 mph blowing snow or sand

over them.

After 10 min. we found that there was no way to get the altimeter to read over 8,210 ft. Even by lowering the nose to pick up more speed, when the nose was raised above level, (and even easing the flaps down slightly), that plane with the two of us and probably half full of gas, just wouldn't fly any higher (that day). Satisfied that we wouldn't have to carry oxygen in these planes, we pointed the nose straight down and --- keeping the air speed under the red line ---pulled out at 1,000 ft.

When the laminated wood (main wingspar) started to creak under our seats, we decided the red notice on the instrument panel "Aerobatics Restricted" was posted with good reason. It was time to head back to the field.

We soon learned to look carefully at the windsock before each landing. There was a saying that the Pecos windsock was once a log chain, but the waving links kept blowing away. If the wind was blowing 50 mph you could set that Cessna UC-78 down in less than 40 yards of runway..... without using the brakes!

There were always at least two students flying together, and sometimes 3 or 4. If two "Hot Shots" got together, each would try to show the other up. One afternoon --- probably on a dare --- a student decided to fly under one of the many telephone lines that stretched across the flat Texas prairie in all directions. He picked a space between two weatherbeaten wood poles and aimed for it with both engines screaming.

With the ground streaking under him at about 140 miles an hour only 4 feet below, and his eyes focused on the shining lines, he suddenly saw a rusty barbed wire fence strung on the same poles! Too

late to climb over the telephone wires--but fearing the tail wheel could pull him into the ground if it caught the double strand fence--- he raised the tail instinctively as the upper wires flew over his head.

He made it! BUT when he came in to land, he was trailing the evidence behind him. There was about 20 ft of the telephone line streaming behind caught on the vertical stabilizer. Telephone service to many customers was cut off, temporarily, but I have no record of when (or if) his Pilot Training was resumed after that trick.

Open Post time allowed sight seeing and some week end entertainment in DOWN TOWN Pecos. The advertized tourist attraction along the Main street (Highway) was "Judge Roy Bean's" court house and museum. After the second visit to that, I decided to enjoy the comforts of the Post Recreation Hall that had a couple of pool tables, card tables, easy chairs and desks for letter writing, rather than put up with the Saloon and Dance Hall bunch "down town".

One Saturday afternoon, from across the room I heard the sound of the most beautiful Violin music I had ever heard. I quickly joined the group of silent listners who had gathered around the grand piano and this artist who paid no attention to us, but was concentrating on the music. For over two hours we were privileged to listen to Yehudi Menuhin ---- PRACTICING ---- with his sister Hephzabah at the piano. They were on their way to a concert, and had chosen to practice at probably the best piano in Pecos.

Many Cadets were GOOD musicians, and demonstrated their talents from time to time, but not one of that group wanted to step up to the piano for several hours after witnessing that unscheduled

performance.

I took my new radio to the base radio repair Sergeant and asked him if he had any tubes to fit it. There was a tube chart pasted inside the cabinet listing the numbers. By using a substitution chart he came up with 3 of the 5, but didn't even find the other 2 listed on his charts. So I still didn't have a working radio. That wasn't too uncommon in Pecos. Until the sun went down, even the best radios could only get one or two stations. After dark it was hard to separate all the AM stations from Mexico and the US, and even Canada.

Cadet Class 44-D was reported as the largest to be trained at Pecos in the Class Book "Checklist". Again I was listed as staff photographer along with Harrold Miller. The Editor was William G. Moody. Out of the hundreds of students I had trained with, on all the bases up to now, this is the only name that will appear with mine in the months to come. I don't have all the exact details of his graduation from Pecos, but playing football he broke his arm, (or leg) and while in the hospital, missed graduating with me. That few weeks delay caused him to become a Co-Pilot instead of a Pilot.

We still had our daily ground school classes and physical training periods. There were some civilians working at the field along with the many Officers and non-coms.

In our "dining room" were 2 rows of tables, with benches on each side, with one end of each against the wall and the other end open to the center aisle running from the kitchen through the length of the building to a double door at the other end. The tables were covered with clean white paper and "properly" set with plates and silverware. (stainless steel). We marched in side by side through

the double door and turned at our assigned table, moving between the tables to our "spot".

At the proper command, we all sat down. Conversation was allowed, but discouraged. At the exact time, a crew of (matching, colored) waiters brought the trays of steaming serving dishes to each table. Each Cadet served himself from the bowl and passed it toward the wall. When the bowl was empty, that was it. There was only one bowl for each table. We were not to pass food between the tables. It was the "place" of the waiters to distribute the food. (Remember this is Texas).

The term "coffin corner" was often used to describe the wall seats. Even in April and May there were some really warm (hot) days in Pecos. After a serving of Texas Chili one Cadet stopped the waiter and asked if he would please bring some water. The answer is recorded for all time.

"Naw'sa Boss-- 'taint on thu mayn you".

After 16 hrs of solo pilot daytime and 16 hrs of solo night flying, along with over 20 hrs of dual (instructor / co-pilot) time recorded at Pecos, and test scores compiled from ground school and over 10 hrs of Link trainer it was time for graduation.

This was quite an impressive ceremony, with the formal Dress Parade and our class formation standing in review. The wind was blowing Texas sand in our face and the only shade was our own shadow.

Our Rank had been Cadet. Formality required each of us to become a Private (on paper only) and to be "discharged" on graduation. Only then could I (and the others) sign the official papers that placed me on the Active United States Army Air Corps Reserve Pilot list.

Private for a day and discharged the same day seemed a rather amusing situation. However, there was nothing amusing about the fact that my signature pledged my service to the USAAF from that moment as a Commissioned Officer until "released by order". That discharge paper is the only "Discharge" I ever received. My rank still is "1st Lt. USAAF Inactive" even though there is now no Army Air Force to be "discharged" from.

Mom and Dad were anxious to take another trip. Dad had purchased a new Packard (Super 180) in 1942; one of the last production models at the start of the war, but didn't feel right about driving it (or showing off) with all the war restrictions on travel and transportation. (Why drive a "115 MPH Limo." at 40MPH)

Lloyd had found a "little" Packard (110) in a Carolina used car lot when he had a 14 day leave and decided to come home from the east coast. Buying the car was cheaper than the rail fair home, and he knew HE could drive cross country faster than the train service! He left the car at home and hitched a ride to his next assignment on an air force plane. The folks then used it for most of their driving because it did get better than average gas mileage.

In this "experienced" 1937 Packard (six cyl with an extra spare tire in the trunk) the folks arrived in Pecos too late for the formal graduation ceremony but in time to pack all my things and head west on Rt. 66 for home.

Ten days free. That was time enough for me to get home again, even from Texas, and show off my new uniforms and WINGS.

T R A N S I T I O N

April 24th we left the ranch with a full supply of gas (and stamps) in the little 4 dr. Packard. The folks never missed any excuse to travel. They were to let me off at Albuquerque Apr. 26th; then go on to pick up Brian at Camp Cambell, Kentucky Apr. 30th; then locate Lloyd at another AAF Base for an overnight visit with him. On May 1st they stopped overnight with Brian at Albuquerque to see me, on their way home for the rest of Brians' 14 day furlow. He road the train back to Campbell when his time was up.

As an officer, I soon learned they were afforded much better accomodations as well as freedom. We were now "on our own" but were expected to account for our actions. A rule book was issued. It was up to you to know the rules---and follow them. We were not to "fraternize" with the enlisted personnel. We were not to use their "facilities". We soon learned where the line was drawn.

We were now expected to pay dues to the the "Club" and arrange for--and pay for--our laundry and dry cleaning. We paid for our meals and "rent" on our room. It didn't take long to figure why Officers were given more "pay" than enlisted personnel who were furnished almost everything. The largest expence at first was the cost of "regulation" tailormade uniforms; heavy wool, light wool, summer cotton, hats and shoes...shoes...shoes.

One thing didn't change.... the trip to the Flight Surgeon for the physical. By now I was expecting to be called back for the EKG test. When it was completed, the Dr. called me into his office for a conference. He studied my medical records carefully, sorting through the many EKG tapes and compared each with the latest test; then said

"You've been through a lot of unnecessary testing, looking for something that isn't there. The 'book' tells doctors to EXPECT permanent heart damage to anyone who has experienced rheumatic fever. There is absolutely no evidence of any damage to your heart. You will not be required to waste time... yours or ours...if you will agree to never mention 'rheumatic fever' to any doctor. I am going to instruct my clerk to put together a new medical file for you, with only the necessary information. This old file will be...LOST...." (In his waste basket)

Kirtland field was not only training qualified U.S. military personnel to fly B-24 planes. On the field and in classes with us were high ranking officers of other Allied countries. Classes were all taught in English, so they must have understood ? some english but most were never heard to speak so we could understand them. There were some really impressive uniforms with gold braid and fancy insignia and sashes walking among us.

We began to realize that all of them were battle trained survivors who were especially qualified to receive bomber flight training not available in their own country. Perhaps some were (or would become) combat pilots, but more likely they would supervise or train their own people to fly the bombers. We were told some ranks compared to our Generals.

With our flight suits covering our uniforms, it was a strange feeling to be squeezed onto a modified (added for training flights) bench seat next to a Chinese General, more than twice my age, trying to understand...learn...the same lessons.

Again I felt sorry for the instructor sitting in the co-pilot (right) seat trying to make one of these foreign student pilots

(left seat) understand the landing plane was too low to clear the electric line crossing the end of the runway we were approaching. The student would smile and nod his head at the instruction to "Pull Up" and continue on the same flight path. At the last moment the instructor would shove all four throttles full ahead, and hope the engines would respond, (They always did...while I was aboard) and flip the landing gear switch "UP" as the air turbulence set the electric lines to waving violently for half a mile in both directions.

As we climbed over the runway and headed away from the traffic pattern, the next student would buckle up in the PILOT seat and the unresponsive "soldier" would move to the rider bench. When this situation involved one of US, the instructor was always more vocal and "rough" with his directions;...KNUCKLE-HEAD... PLOW-JOCKY... FOG-BOUND... TRENCH-DIGGER... IDIOT... DOUGH-BRAIN or TAIL-GUNNER. He might have been reluctant to use these terms on the "Visitors", thinking they probably wouldn't understand anyway if they couldn't recognize "Too Low".

Our ground school classes were becoming more technical and more intensive. Battle strategy, aircraft and ship recognition, both ours and the enemy and tactics... fair and foul. The Pacific war had by this time, (1944) established new rules that erased whole pages from the "traditional" rule book.

The Japanese soldiers were demonstrating such ferocious contempt for anyone found obstructing their "Path to Glory" that they felt it their "duty" to not only kill the enemy but to cut them into small pieces. Reports of recent Naval Battles and Island Landings were reviewed, but always with the admonition, these are "Secret" and are not for public information.

As we look back on published reports of some of these battles, there WERE no secrets between us and the enemy. The ONLY "victories" that were recorded must be attributed to God's hand on thousands of soldiers and servants following His direction.

Some of the most prominent "HERO" and "LEADER" names of the 1940s have lost their sparkle as the true facts are listed. The true WONDER of the entire Pacific Operation is that from our (US and Allied) blunders and stupidities could come anything called a WIN. From documented evidence of pre-knowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack to the Washington "surprise" decision to drop ATOM bombs, there was almost as much fighting between our "Top Brass" as with the enemy. Some of the fights were made public, but you may be sure there were many, many more that only the "troups" witnessed. But back to class.

Along with the "Foreign" officers in our classes were some enlisted men and almost any rank Officer from 2nd Lt. (me) to Full Colonels. One morning class on the B-24 electrical system, was well under way with the instructor using his pointer to trace the current path on a large chart as he described the batteries, auxiliary generator (Put-Put), voltage regulator, engine generator, (On # 3 engine), engine starters, prop. controls, light system and flight suit heater plug-ins, etc.

This Tech-Sgt. teacher knew his subject from fuse holder to engine ground strap and seldom referred to the Text Book we were holding. He stopped talking for a moment and we all became aware of a conversation on the back row. Lowering his pointer, he ordered the "talker" to

"Stand up".

"State the system operating voltage, its upper and lower limits and how it is controlled".

It was obvious the Colonel had not been listening, but said... without thinking

"You will call me Sir".

In the next moments that Sgt. taught us all a lesson more important than the B-24 Electrical Systems.

"When you are attending my class, I out-rank you. My assignment is to teach you this subject as I know it. I may be only a Sgt. to you, but until you know what I know about this subject, you will not pass this class".

"Now memorize chapter 8 of the book...as I wrote it...and report back to me tomorrow".

We were there to fly B-24s and fly we did, almost every day. With as many as 8 or 9 students in the big plane at a time, we took turns taking off and landing and flying headings and altitudes. Next came instrument landings and take-offs.

Our hours of simulated flying in the Link Trainers now changed to actually moving a 19 ton tri-cycle, 110ft wide down a runway at 120 mph without seeing it, and finding our way back to the runway using instruments and radio only. Flying at night isn't too hard to do with the runway marker lights to land between and also show you where the GROUND is. Full instrument flying eliminates ALL outside references.

Dark green plastic panels were tightly fitted to all cockpit windows. The instructor...and passengers...could see out through the "shades" with everything looking GREEN. The pilot put on goggles with a dark RED lense covering his eyes. To him everything inside

the plane was red except the windows, which were a total BLACK; instant blackout.

The instructor positioned the plane on the runway for take-off and turned it over to the BLIND pilot. Unless the student started running over runway marker lights, the instructor let him go on his own. At times it was harder on us "passenger" students than on the pilot. We wanted to yell directions at him, but that wasn't allowed. Many times I found it easier to watch the floor (and pray) than to watch the runway.

The flight procedure on instruments was to keep the runway (takeoff) heading until the designated altitude was reached; then fly a new heading and speed for a measured time. The instructor would call out a new heading. After maybe 10 min of keeping the wings level (with the artificial horizon indicator), holding the designated altitude and speed... and sometimes a distraction by cutting out one engine for a few moments... the order was given to find the runway and land.

The tower radio beacon had to be identified and monitored until you determined if the signal was getting weaker (going away from the tower) or getting stronger (right direction). If you had been paying attention to your turns, you might guess at least if you were left or right of the field.

Henry Ford had developed a simple radio locator beam system years before. The radio signal was either a dah-dit (N) or a dit-dah (A). The interval between each signal told you how far from the "Beam" you were. When you were "on the Beam" the signal became a single tone. To drift off to one side it slowly became a dah-dit or the other side it changed to a dit-dah. The closer to the runway

(antenna) the narrower the beam became.

Finding and navigating the radio beam had been mastered in the Link Trainer so after the proper turns, the familiar landing approach signals led you to the end of the runway. Radio approach equipment and instruments have been so improved now that the plane can be "Programed" to land itself on a spot, but at that time it was all in the pilots' hands (and head) to control approach glide path, plane attitude and altitude, speed and direction, and be ready to cut the power when the wheels touched the ground, using only the instruments and the "seat of his pants".

The first few times out on these runs were more than a little worrisky, but trust in the instructor (and the other observers) eventually turned full attention to navigation while the plane just followed your direction.

One of our training requirements was an overnight cross country flight to test our navigation and acquaint us with other landing patterns and runways. We were scheduled to fly to Atlanta, Ga., and return over St. Louis and back to New Mexico.

The planes we were training in were early models that had been returned from combat after their calculated efficient (useful) life had been reached. All the armament (guns and turrets) had been removed... and probably been installed in other combat planes... and provisions were made for passengers (students) behind the pilots in the flight deck and in the waist cargo area. False floors were fitted in the bomb bays to give additional cargo room.

Our flight to Atlanta was to serve two purposes. The group of students in a plane the day before ours, had been grounded at Atlanta because of a leaking fuel tank. We were to deliver a new

tank... bullet-proof? self sealing? rubber? fuel cell... (to be fitted in the wing between #3 and #4 engines) of their plane, and bring back the passengers (students). It would likely take more than a week to get their plane back in the air, and our training schedule did not allow for such an indefinite prolonged "furlough".

We did get some very useful experience in locating and landing at Atlanta... almost full instrument approach. Thick clouds were covering most of the State and it was raining HARD when we landed.

The instructor didn't want to trust his neck to "beginners". HE SHOWED us how to land on a strange, short, muddy field. No one complained, except him. What he had planned as 2 days of relaxation had turned into a soggy mess. The grounded crew was happy to join us and get back to DRY New Mexico and the upcoming graduation ceremony.

I received the news from home that Lloyd had married a girl he had been dating for some time in Oklahoma. His assignments had taken him to several different bases (all in the States) and this move to Oklahoma was (as the others had been) not to last very long.

I was keeping the mail service busy with letters to Cedar Rapids, and my "pen pal" was persuaded to make the train trip, with her mother, to visit me at Albuquerque after her graduation and be with me on my graduation from B-24 Transition. It was in Albuquerque that Norma accepted my engagement ring. Together we rode the train to Stockton for another 14 day furlow. It was agreed marriage would be postponed until I was at least stationed somewhere more than "temporary".

Next I was to report to... Lemoore again; first week of July.

8

C R E W

Destination...Lemoore? Rapid changes in Air Corps training plans had changed the status of Lemoore Field to a Crewing Base.

This meant that flight crew personnel from all the various schools were shipped here for combat crew assignment. Gunners, engineers, radio men, bombardiers, navigators and co-pilots in effect were pooled for our selection. As a B-24 graduate Pilot, it was up to me to select my own 9 man crew!

This wasn't exactly like picking neighborhood kids for a two hour baseball game. These "Kids" (average age 30) were from Maine.. Florida.. Washington.. Texas and every state between. Some were "Regular Army" soldiers who had qualified for special ratings. Some were "Draftees" who were called away from high paying professional careers. Some were farmers. Some were college students. Many were "Cadets" that had dreamed of being "Hot Pilots" but for any number of reasons had "washed out"... but all were to be considered proficient in their field.

Just HOW proficient outside the classroom was yet to be determined...BY ME. There was no rating to be found on how each could (or would) get along with the other crew members. We were to be spending days together inside a cramped, noisy, freezing, aluminum box with the wind blowing 200 mph past the "front door", and at times the target of guns from below and above. At such times each would have a specific responsibility to perform, but there would be hours and hours of sitting or watching (and wishing) or playing games. On the ground we would be eating, working and playing together in our enlisted or officer areas.

As I studied the name lists on the board, my eyes fell on a name I recognized. On the Co-Pilot list was Lt. William G. Moody, who had missed graduation at Pecos because of a short hospital stay. I had worked with him on the Class book but had not been in classes or flown with him... Moody doesn't come that close to Vanciel in the alphabetical line-up. I did know that his home was Sacramento, and that he was married. I also knew the reason he was not listed as Pilot was no reflection on his ability.

I called William Moody out of the group for a talk with him. As soon as he saw me his face lit up. He had become very discouraged over missing the Pecos 44-D class graduation and being sent to another transition school of B-17 planes. The Air Corps didn't need (or have) B-17s to fly so he was listed as a B-24 Co-Pilot. Production of B-17s had changed to B-29s and B-24s were coming off the assembly lines at the rate of "one every 100 minutes!!" I didn't mind teaching him the B-24, in fact I probably would have had to teach any one of those listed.

With Bill to help me, we started looking over the prospects for a Navigator. We agreed on F/O Hubert Schumacher, (An Easterner from Minn.) Then the three of us chose F/O Robert Seddon as Bombardier, a native of Iowa. This made up our Officer crew, average age 26 and Bill the only one married.

The next... and most important... selection was the Engineer. Really he was the mechanic and was responsible for the whole plane. Engines, controls, tires, hydraulics, fuel and electrical systems, all had to have his approval before he reported to me, "OK for flight". It was his job to read the fuel gages and transfer fuel between tanks when necessary. He was "legs" in the air. From the

tail to the nose compartment, he would check out any problem and correct it. He was expected to take over any of the gun positions if it became necessary to do so in flight. We agreed on Cpl. Virgin Blessin and asked him to help us select the other five enlisted men.

As many of them had been through the same gunnery school, they had an opportunity to at least know a lot of names, even if they might not know much about each other.

Cpl. Steve Kreczko was chosen as Assistant Engineer, and nose turret gunner. He was the biggest (tallest and heaviest) member and of more importance to us, was formerly trained as an MP.

Cpl. John Yuhasz was chosen as our radio operator. He worked closely with the navigator and was to man a waist gun when necessary. His regular station was behind the Co-pilot at a desk, with the radios below the desk. He was the oldest crew member (29) married with one child. He quietly accepted the name "grandpa" by the others.

Cpl. Edward Brener was responsible for the top turret, which gave him a clear view of the top of the plane and the sky above. He was the assistant radio operator, (who had to move aside whenever the turret was in use). His extra duty, (very important) was the 3 gal. coffee thermos strapped to the bulkhead.

Cpl. William Braun was the tail turret gunner and also was expected to bring the lunch (food) box aboard and stow it for our in-flight "picknics".

Cpl. Raymond Prochnick was the ball turret gunner and was to see that all the gun positions were supplied with proper ammunition. Each one was trained to strip, inspect, clean, and assemble any of the 50 Cal. guns in flight if necessary.

Bob Seddon, the Bombardier supervised the loading of the bombs onto the bomb racks and checked their "safety" before take-off. In the air he walked back between the racks on the 7" catwalk to set the fuses and release the latch safetys before the bomb run.

This was the crew assembled from names listed (alphabetically) on the bulletin board. I'm sure they were all ready to "Get going" and "Do their thing". Each one had accepted and qualified for his training, and as far as I could tell, was looking for a chance to show what he could do.

Time would prove that all crews formed at Lemoore did not (or could not) agree to work together. Our next training phase would subject us to as many combat situations as experienced returned combat instructors could arrange. Using every means they could think up, they intended to prove to us that we were in this war to win it. That could only be done with everyone doing his part.

P R A C T I C E

The second week of July 1944, with my new crew, we were loaded on another troop train headed for Reno. (Very bad place to have to change trains). After a brief wait, we were to board the Tonopah & Goldfield train. This was to be by first test of the "Green" crew. With over a half hour to "kill" those Easterners all wanted to see Reno. I made it very clear to all of my new "Kids" that they were to be at the boarding gate in 20 minutes, and they took off. Bill and I escorted Bob and Herbert ("Bert") down Main street and made a walking tour through a couple of the larger casinos, only pausing long enough to get an idea of what was going on.

Back at the station, we found the platform so jammed with soldiers, (and now sailors going to Hawthorn) I began to wonder if we could get on the train. I looked around and found my new crew working their way toward us with Steve (6'2" ex MP) leading them. When he got up to us he said

"Follow me".

He cleared a path through the shoulder to shoulder service men and through the gate, then up the steps into the first rail coach. I might add it very well could have been THE "first" rail coach of the Tonopah & Goldfield RR!

As far as I was concerned, my new crew had passed their first "test" with flying colors. As we found seats.. first come-first served.. it was almost like waking up in a western movie set. The seats were Oak wood slats (like park benches). The window tops were arched colored "Leaded glass". The light fixtures were oil lamps with Tiffany and painted shades. At the end of the "coach" was a

fancy wood stove with wood-box alongside. The upper half of the heavy wood paneled doors at each end had beautiful colored glass windows. This was going to be a memorable ride.

Outside the windows, the crowd seemed to be getting larger and the announced time of departure had already passed. We had a front row seat to watch an Army-Navy-Marine "Game" (Reno style) battle it out on the loading platform. The object of the game...get a seat on the train.

This was the ONLY train South, and only ran once a day. Hitch-hicking was NOT the way to travel across the desert, if you HAD to get back to your base on schedule. The local MPs and Shore Patrol finally separated the winners from the losers, and hauled several loads of subdued service men off to the impound, and allowed some bloody nosed and sore jawed "Winners" to stagger aboard the still waiting train.

And wait it did --- for almost half an hour. When it finally steamed away from the station, there was standing room only and not really much of that on most of the cars. As you may guess, there were a LOT of last moment passengers that had not purchased their tickets, so had to buy them on the train.

It wasn't long after the train started moving that there were dozens of card games under way with standing observers and kibitzers crowding around. By the time the train reached the Navy base at Hawthorn, there were many "poor" servicemen that would not only be poor, but also in debt to their "lucky" buddies. Even the casual observers soon became aware of the sure ability.. memory.. eye.. hand.. coordination of the "winners" of the many games. I was reminded of Mark Twains stories of professional gamblers on the

River Boats.

The stop at Hawthorn cleared the train of almost half the passengers; and maybe more than half of all cash pocket money. Three or four rail-coaches were left at Hawthorn to lighten the load on the panting steam engine. Built for burning wood, the tender had been converted to supply coal when wood became too hard to find. The only scheduled stops were for water and coal.

The closer we got to Tonopah, the slower the train chugged. About the last 5 miles, (Water tower in sight) the train was going so slow that many stepped off and walked alongside just for the exercise. The mountains behind Tonopah didn't look to be all that high, but when we looked back over the desert we had come across, we really had been climbing. The train finally came to a stop about 1/4 mi. from town. AAF buses were waiting to take us to the training base.

Tonopah was making a comeback after years of desertion and decay. The Air Field with its warehouses, barracks, operations buildings, classroom buildings, hangers and maintenance facilities covering acres of windblown desert was bringing new life to a dead town.

The one main street with its gas stations, lumber yard, grocery stores, saloons, restaurants, hotels and casinos was (almost) as crowded as Reno when the servicemen were allowed off base. Wives had taken up residence in just about any "room" that could be adapted to sleeping or "living" areas. Tumbled down shacks were restored to temporary "Rental Units", even if they were on dirt back streets with no names.

It took a little longer to become "oriented" at this base because it was so spread out. After all, the tree-less desert to the East, North and South stretched un-interrupted as far as you

could see.

Our newly (and hurriedly) built barracks units were shaped like an H with a center hall running the length of each leg, an outside door at each end and one at each side giving access to the washroom-shower and lavatory unit in the center. This service area (cement) floor was slightly above outside ground level with three steps up to each side hallway. The rest of the building was all wood frame on cement foundation putting the wood floor about 3 ft. above the desert sand.

Two man rooms were partitioned off with doors opening into the hall and an outside window in each room. (With double deck bunk beds four could be assigned to each room). The inside walls were not finished. Outside sheeting was panels of Celotex covered with tar paper nailed to the studs. Inside partitions were unpainted Celotex panels nailed to one side of the studs only. These "Officers" quarters were only used for sleeping, dressing and "storage". Studying and leisure time were spent at the Officers Club or the dining hall several hundred yards (blocks) away.

With my "new" medical records filed, no time was lost in walking through my flight physical. Our first time in the air as a crew might best be called "Free and easy". The clear air and new runway (some sections) made takeoff and landing easy. Each one followed his instructions without prompting and they spent an hour exploring the plane and their new (used) equipment. Their assignments were to get harder and "free" time was going to get shorter as training moved ahead.

There were to be gunnery practice sessions firing at targets towed behind small planes. (Way behind). There were to be low level

65
runs (500' or lower) for them to shoot at all sorts of ground targets zipping past them at 150 mph. Old cars had been scattered for them to aim at. Some Hollywood type store fronts and buildings had been set up. Locomotives and rail cars (some real) and tank cars were planted for their targets.

Streets and cross roads were built (not going anywhere) for the Bombardier to locate and drop dummy bombs on. These flights could be either day or night, giving the navigator a chance to give us direction to the target. By this time Bill was getting used to the co-pilot position and was pleased when I started sharing time with him in my left seat. This seemed to be a problem with some pilots. They didn't want to let their co-pilots learn to fly the left seat.

Some of our ground school classes now included the whole crew, while some included only the gunners or the officers. There were always scheduled P.E. classes (under the hot desert sun) and pre-flight briefings.

There was parachute jumping practice from a high tower, using the chest packs to the dry ground, and also into a pond wearing a "Mae West" life jacket to learn when to open the chute, and when to inflate the "Mae West". It was most important to know how to put on the life vest; if it was under the parachute harness and inflated, the harness snaps couldn't be released and would prevent breathing until the harness was cut off or the vest de-flated. If the air was released from the vest, it required blowing it up again through a mouth piece (if you had any breath left). The first inflation was done by a small CO2 cylinder that was only good for one time.

An old B-24 was planted in a big "swimming pool" with only the top half above the water level. Each crew was ferried out to the

plane, crawled in through a waist window and the open top hatch.

With everyone in his assigned ditching position, the order was given to "clear the plane" while an observer (instructor) timed the operation. Everyone had a specific assignment and point of exit. One (or two) self inflating life rafts stowed above the rear bomb bay were pulled through upper hatches with tether lines to keep them from blowing or drifting away. When all were in the life raft(s) and paddled to a marker well away from the plane, the time was recorded.

If anyone failed to bring his specific equipment, a penalty was added to the time. While there was (hopefully) emergency supplies packed in the life rafts, any extra brought aboard could mean the difference between ultimate rescue or death. The point of this exercise timing was repeated again and again; A B-24 FLOATED JUST LIKE A ROCK. We were told to be clear of a ditched plane inside of two minutes, or go down with it. The drill was repeated daily until our time was less than the 2 Min.

This might be a good time to state that I didn't take to water. Every swimming class (required) had been attended and the instructors had all tried to teach me to swim. Every training base had listed swim and lifesaving requirements. I learned all the movements...but I couldn't float without help. Each had released me with a belief that I would learn to swim "when my life depended on it". I did learn to get along reasonably well in the water...as long as I had the life jacket on!

These ditching exercises were practiced, but I rather had my mind made up that I was NOT going to try one. I was perfectly willing to leave such activities up to the Navy. In choosing the Army Air Corps. it was with the idea that I was going to be on LAND

or in the AIR... not in the WATER or under it.

Another interesting training "aid" was the Celestial Navigation "silo". This tall cylindrical building had no windows, but was air conditioned. In the ceiling was a movable dome with small lights spaced exactly like star constellations, that could be rotated and shifted in any direction. Centered below this "sky dome" was a mock-up B-24 cockpit and nose section with the bombardier's bombsight and the navigator's desk and observation dome window.

Mounted on a swivel, this "plane" could nose up, down, lean left or right and turn any compass heading following the controls of the pilot. Below this was the "ground" (projection screen) showing true aerial scenes of the runway, roads, rivers, mountains, buildings and fields. An operator in an enclosed control booth below (and amidst all the mechanical and hydraulic machinery) set up the coordinated scene... sky, ground, altitude, day or night, even clouds (smoke)... while we; the crew, took our places in the "plane".

The lights went out, and as the ground and sky appeared, the sound of the engines came on and radio instructions were given through the headphones. While I held the set course and altitude... even rough air turbulence was realistic... the navigator was to identify the stars overhead, take a sextant reading on selected ones, plot the readings on his maps and report to me where we were (anywhere in the world) and give me a heading to a target (or the nearest known landing field) with an estimated time of arrival at a given ground speed. As I turned to the new heading, he was to double check his position and make whatever corrections he thought necessary. IF he was right, at the estimated time stated the target would come into view on the screen below.

As soon as I was sure of the target, I set up the bomb run according to pre-planned heading and altitude. As the target approached, the "plane" controls were turned over to the bombardier and his bomb sight. This was the famous "Nordon"- "secret" bomb sight that was touted as the "ultimate precision instrument that could pinpoint a target at 30 or 40,000 ft." As Bob lined up the cross hairs on the target, the "plane" followed his sight movements, and as he released the bomb(s) there was a slight bump upward just as if we were really dropping them from the plane. Then as I turned the "plane" we watched as the "bomb" hit the ground. Bob proved to be good at making the necessary wind drift and speed corrections to hit the target.

"Bert" (Schumacher) the navigator was to have a new heading ready for me to the next target, or back to the base as called for. All headings, altitude, air and ground speeds and time were recorded in the control room on a chart that was graded and reviewed after the "flight". These practice "flights" gave us a chance to work together and I am still amazed when I think back at how realistic those trainers were.

Useing electrical, mechanical and hydraulic controls with projectors and sound recording, they did simulate situations at almost any geographic location. Of course computer chips have taken over the need for the truckload of switches, relays, wiring and projection film used in those 45 ft tall by 25 ft diameter windowless silos, but I'm sure pilots and crews are still trained and practice in similar equipment matching this jet (rocket) age.

Friday nights and Saturdays were the most popular times in the Main street casinos down town but the alternating training schedules

of the base personnel usually started the action about 18:00 every afternoon. One tuesday afternoon I went along with Bill and some others after an early supper to watch the action in the main casino.

There was a crowd gathered around a Roulette wheel that was drawing players away from the other "games". We watched for almost an hour as chips were stacking up in front of several soldiers and one in particular, that the others seemed to be following. When he finally picked up his chips, tipped the operator (girl) and cashed them in, dozens of others crowded up to play. Bill noticed that this one wheel operator was paying out more than the usual amount of money, even for a come-on. Shortly the operator went on break and another girl took over the wheel. For the next 20 min the "wheel" took almost ALL the money put down.

Bill was more experienced with Nevadas "games of chance" than most of the Easterners and knew what to look for... and when. He suggested we come back later and watch for their game pattern. Sure enough by 10 oclock he had decided that the one girl operator could (and would) drop that little ball into a specific pocket (number) 8 out of 10 times. His idea was to come back the next afternoon and check his calculations.

Wednesday afternoon he became more sure as he watched the activities and figured out which number(s) were hitting when "our girl" was controlling the "game".

Friday was the big evening. Also pay day for the enlisted men. I went with him as an observer and watched as his pile of chips began to double and tripple. To play "the game", and to throw some of the "followers" off, he started picking other numbers, while drawing off chips for me to hold. When we left the room that night,

he had made more than a months pay, and decided it best not to give the "house" a chance to get it back.

In fact as we walked down Main street the next night, that roulette wheel was in a side alley with a tarp over it. In the game room was a new Wheel, and a new operator.

One of our navigational test flights was scheduled to take off from Tonopah and fly over El Paso, Texas and return. We were to take off after a day of ground school classes at 4 oclock (16:00) which gave us about 3 hours of daylight. I had no problem navigating over the desert and mountains with ground check points like towns, rivers, canyons, railroads etc. that I had visited, (some many times) by car in our previous family trips, but this was all new territory for Bert and the others. I followed the navigators heading and kept an eye on the ground to make sure he was right. With only one correcting heading, we flew over the air port at El Paso, made our radio check in with tower and circled to head back to Tonopah.

It had been dark for about an hour and the night was clear, with more stars than you could count and no moon. This gave me a chance to prove to Bill a lesson I had learned while night flying over Pecos. It was almost impossible to see the horizon; clear skies with lots of stars, and no moon to light the earth but countless oil well waste torches burning in all directions.

Those scattered fires looked exactly like stars in the sky. Within a few minutes of "star gazing" it became almost impossible to be sure which were stars and which were ground torches. This is no time to depend on "The seat of your pants" to navigate. You have to depend on your instruments to keep the wings level.

At 7,500 ft it was cold enough back in the waist and in the nose section to want a blanket over the heavy flight suits. We didn't have the electric plug in suits that would be available later (when necessary).

Bert plotted our return heading and ground speed and decided to wrap up and relax for the next 4 hours. When I saw his compartment light go out (we could see into his compartment through an opening around our rudder pedals) I turned to Bill and said

"I'm tired. Let's get back home to our warm beds." He said

"I'm with you".

We had been cruising at about 140 mph indicated air speed, which was about 160 mph ground speed. By easing the throttles up slightly and reducing the RPM, the plane was up to 160 air speed with a ground speed of 180 mph.

When we got in sight of the Tonopah runway, I called Bert (woke him up) and asked him for a position fix. He made his quick calculations and looking out his window saw the lights of Tonopah and reported

"10 min. to Las Vegas."

I cut back on the power and started letting down for the landing. We were into the traffic pattern and dropping the landing gear as I called for everyone to take their landing stations. When Bert came up to the flight deck (still half asleep) and asked

"Why are we landing in Las Vegas?" Bert said

"I'm getting tired too and wanted some sleep."

When we taxied into the parking stall, Bert realized this was Tonopah, and figured out the trick we had played on him. His comment

"You guys know THIS country better than I do, but when we get over the ocean... I'll show YOU!"

This was going to be his (and our crews) answer whenever anyone asked where we were,

"Ten minutes to Las Vegas".

I'm sure there were many accidents that were never made public. All of the B-24 planes we were using were "War Wearys". That meant that they were returned from combat after reaching or exceeding their expected air time (miles) and number of landings. Ground crews were kept busy inspecting and replacing units and parts to "Keep them Flying".

Even the best efforts and intentions are sometimes frustrated. After making some minor engine repairs to one plane, the crew chief was running up the #3 engine and testing the hydraulic propeller controls. This was routine check list operation by every pilot before take-off. There was another mechanic at the radio desk (behind the co-pilot seat) watching the engine through the radio operator's window that is directly in line with the #3 propeller.

With no warning of any kind, one of the 6 foot propeller blades broke at the hub and, at the speed of a bullet the knife edged steel blade sliced through the side of the plane, through the flight deck floor and radio operator's desk, instantly killing the mechanic.

It could have sailed off in any direction, but why did it go into the side of the plane? This could have happened with a training crew on take-off or even in the air. All B-24s were "grounded" until every propeller was removed, dismantled and magniflux inspected for defects or cracks, and the official "Inspected OK" signature on the plane service record card. This gave us about a week delay in our

flying schedule which had to be caught up by stretching our in/air time later.

Bill made arrangements for his wife and new baby to rent a room in Tonopah. She drove their car from Sacramento and he helped get his little family settled (?) in town. Bill lost no time in getting to the rented room when classes were dismissed. One Friday afternoon we cleaned up and dressed for supper and a relaxing evening at the Officer's Club. ^{Betty}~~Linda~~, his wife and baby were our guests. While we were eating, sirens sounded and someone looking out the window announced FIRE. I went to the window to see a towering cloud of black smoke about three blocks away.

It was our barracks. We rushed out and down the street, but couldn't get closer than a block from the burning inferno. The black smoke turned to 100 ft flames for an instant and in less than 4 min the whole building was like dying match sticks lying in a heap on the ground. The fire engines were pumping water on the neighboring barracks to keep them from catching fire. There was no way they could begin to stop the flames of the dry celotex and tar paper once it caught fire.

No one was sure who was in the building. We were lucky to be wearing at least a full uniform. Everything left in the barracks was GONE. Many were out in a PE class wearing only their trunks and gym shoes.

An immediate effort was made to determine if there was anyone in the building. An emergency roll call was announced over the loud speakers. This gave them a list of those still on the base, but there still wasn't a record of who had already left the base from that barracks. Needless to say there was great confusion.

The fire inspectors reported evidence later of at least 3 bodies burned inside. One could have been in his bunk and two were in the hallway a few feet from the a door, face down. There were several who did escape but were burned. They reported smelling smoke and yelling fire as they ran through the hall to the nearest door, but it was almost like an explosion of smoke and flame and they couldn't tell where it came from.

Our quiet evening turned into a round of frustration. First we had to sign in for new room assignments. (Doubling up in rooms.) Then we had to get requisitions from the Base Commander's office for replacement bedding, flying equipment, clothes, shoes, towels etc. As officers we were expected to buy our own uniforms, this was now a matter of insurance expence, but the question was... where can we get the tailored uniforms we were expected to wear? The Tonopah Men's store sold Levi's and checkered shirts. It was agreed that we should have some time (?) off to go shopping for new uniforms.

The next day, after the heat had died down, I sifted through the ashes and found what was left of my prized Kodak Recomar 6X9 cm. view camera and accessories in its charred sole leather case. I have long since given up hope of ever getting it restored, or even replaced, but I still would like to have one like it. Everything else was GONE.

So it was that Labor day weekend was stretched into a 5 day "Open Post" time for us "Burned out officers" to get some new uniforms. In talking with Bill, we "hatched" a plan to get home for 3 of the 5 days.

Tonapah had a Taxi cab owned and operated (when she wasn't doing something else) by a (genial) single woman. Friday about noon, we

approached her sitting in her battered and dusty 4 door 1938 Buick in front of the Main street casino waiting for a customer... any customer. Always ready for conversation, she was soon giving us the latest news of the area (some that would never be printed) and let us know how hard it was to make a living with her taxi and all the gasoline and tire rationing etc.

This was just what we wanted (and expected) to hear. We asked her how much she would charge to take us (5 plus baby) to Sacramento and Stockton and come back Tuesday. She lit up like a light bulb. Her first remark

"I have a friend in Stockton I've been wanting to visit".

"If you will provide the ration stamps and gasoline (and tire stamp if necessary) I'll take you for \$75.00".

This was better than we had hoped for.

"When can we leave?"

"Let me pack my suit-case and we can leave about 4 oclock."

So it was "about 4" when we left Tonopah (in their only taxi) and headed for Reno. With the hot sun shimmering off the white desert sand and on the weather cracked concrete pavement, our 45 MPH top speed limit provided our only Air Conditioning through the 4 wide open car windows. Conversation was interesting and somewhat informative for the first hour. Our driver was getting sleepy and asked if one of us would drive while she took a nap. I volunteered. Let the others hold the baby.

I really hadn't expected more than enough power to pass any cars going my direction, even if there had been any. Neither had I expected to hear iron to iron grinding when the brake pedal was

pushed. The farther I drove the more I thought of crossing (old) Donner Summit with bad brakes, in the dark! I didn't say anything to the others until we got into Carson City and came up to the stop sign in front of the Capitol Bldg. The situation changed from bad brakes to NO BRAKES.

The owner said she had been meaning to get the brakes fixed, but there was no place in Tonopah she could trust to do the job; BUT she had a friend in Reno who could fix them. I drove to Reno using the parking brake lever to stop... stopping only when I really HAD to stop. It was after 9 when we climbed out at a cafe in Reno to eat supper while she took the Buick to get it "fixed."

Bill, ^{Betty}~~Linda~~, Bob, Bert and I enjoyed our leasurly meal and still figured we had an hour to watch some of Reno's 24 hour entertainment. The baby had given absolutely no trouble.

About 11:30 the Buick ground to a stop in front of our Cafe, and we climbed back in. Her "Friend" had indeed managed to restore pedal action, but of course didn't have time (or parts) to correct the grinding noise. When she found out that I had driven Donner countless times, I was elected to drive "over the Hill". It wasn't too hard to convince me to drive, when I realized the others were not at all familiar with the road. In fact Bob and Bert had never been over it and had no idea any "highway" could be so steep and crooked. In the darkness they couldn't see how steep the mountain really is. At midnight the few cars on the road presented no great problem. My greatest fear was not having enough power, even in low gear, and if stalled, would I have brakes enough to keep from rolling back down the crooked road!

Those fears faded as we crawled between the high rocks that

marked the top of "OLD DONNER PASS". As we started down the West side, I began to remember how many times I had driven this road in the GMC 4 speed pick up... both loaded and empty... when working for the Gold Dredge at Battle Mountain. Each turn and steep section was anticipated, so by keeping in second gear... or even low... there was no trouble keeping below 45 or slowing to 25 for the sharper turns without using the brake pedal for more than a few seconds at a time. While concentrating on the road, I hadn't realized that all the passengers were asleep.

When I pulled up in front of Bill's house in Sacramento, Bob and Bert decided they would stay in Sacramento and we set a time to pick them up on the return trip. I drove on home to the Stockton/Escalon new ranch and the taxi owner agreed to pick me up Tuesday morning for the return trip. She assured me that new brakes would be installed and there would be NEW BRAKE FLUID installed. Now she tells me there was NO brake fluid available in Reno, so her "friend" had filled the brake system with WATER.

I had a nice visit with the folks and was given the grand tour of the NEW Ranch at Escalon they had bought, and learned how they were planning to build a new house, barns etc. just as soon as enough lumber and materials could be gathered. They were living in a temporary two room shed type building while the existing double garage and tank house were stacked with furniture, boxes and trunks.

Dad explained his idea of preparing this place as a home for all of us to come back to when the war was over and each could have work to do and share in the combined income. A shopping trip to San Francisco provided me with the new uniforms needed... for now.

When the "taxi" picked me up Tuesday morning, I was glad to know

that new brakes had been installed and the pedal was working properly. The owner was happy to have the work done "outside Tonopah". When we picked up the others in Sacramento, I was ready to turn the driving over to Bill for the daylight trip over the mountain on highway 50 through Placerville and back to Tonopah. I was also glad that we didn't have to buy any tires for the taxi, but we did give her one of our ration stamps to get a new (?) tire.

Our crew training classes and flying "missions" got back on schedule and we were feeling pretty good about our progress reports. Some of the other crews had changed personnel for various reasons. It was becoming obvious that if a crew member couldn't get along with someone in his crew, he likely wasn't going to get along with someone in the next crew either, but it usually made things a little easier in the crew he left.

If there were any problems among "my" bunch, I didn't hear about it. They were quick to report dis-satisfaction among the other crews and quite often it was based on their "officer's performance" (or non-performance). This had a tendency to keep me "on the ball". I was looking ahead to the time I might need their instant cooperation without stopping to question a decision.

We were informed that our next move, after completion of training at Tonopah, was assignment in the South Pacific. Schumacher decided he wanted to marry his home town sweetheart before going overseas. She came out to Tonopah and they were married just before we were sent to our next base... Hamilton Field, Marin County, California.

Nov. 12, 1944 the troupe train took us around San Francisco Bay to Marin and the big "Permanent" Hamilton Air Field.

P O R T O F E M B A R K A T I O N

November in Marin County (Hamilton Army Air Field) was a real treat after the summer in Tonopah. With green trees shading the rolling North Bay hills and cool (sometimes cold) breezes blowing off the Pacific Ocean, it was like R. & R. (Rest & Relaxation) time. The permanent Base Officer's Quarters and many operational buildings were SO different from the temporary base facilities we had been training at. Given the slightest hint of spending the rest of our service time here, would have been instantly acceptable by every one of us. We were given group introduction lectures on Base rules and Regulations by ranking (and decorated) officers. We were ordered to get all our affairs in order at this base. Our next Mail Address would be an APO number. In the next few days there would be assistance on any legal matters; wills, insurance, allotments et.al. Moveing into our assigned pleasant quarters was rather "shadowed" by the growing realization that we had just been told "This is it".

Bert's new wife, with his rather limited help, found a room a few miles from the Field and at every opportunity he was with her. Bill's wife also found a room in the same area. This gave the six of us a chance to be together for evening dinners and some sightseeing trips in the area. Free time was running out.

One morning we were all called into the Base assembly room. The Officer in Charge announced in positive terms there were to be NO phone calls off the base and everyone was restricted to base "As of Now". He called attention to the printed equipment list each of us was holding. It was a check-off list of every piece of personal equipment we were to be issued, from a 45 Automatic pistol

(M1911 A1) to parachute, 5 different pair of flying gloves and jungle survival tools. The day was spent in gathering all our listed equipment, lugging it back to our rooms and packing everything into our duffle (and B-4) bags. Each crew Pilot was to report for a briefing at 06:00 (Nov 8) after breakfast, while all the other crew members were to stand by in the ready room with all of their equipment. Included with our plane equipment was a three gallon Thermos jug of coffee and an insulated box with our lunches.

At our briefing we were each given a large sealed envelope marked in large red letters "SECRET". These were our "ORDERS". Verbal instructions were to board our plane with our crew and all equipment. Inspection of the plane was to be thorough and in detail. Each Pilot was assigned a brand new plane. Mine was one of six B-24-L Consolidated bombers parked on the flight line, built at Willow Run by FORD, (1944 production). In signing the inspection list, we were accepting a combat plane for delivery overseas. An exact time was given to get everything ready and call the tower for take-off instructions.

As I led my crew out onto the flight line and located # 696 among the bright silver planes, we were all acting cheerful, but down inside each was trying hard to cover feelings of desperation. No doubt the ones feeling more depressed were Bill and Bert because they had not been able to contact their wives to let them know what was happening.

Everything was loaded and each one checked his station and its equipment. All seemed in order as I signed the delivery receipt for the ground crew and took my place at the controls. The tower was called and instructions were given to take off one minute after

plane #680, waiting at the end of the runway. Climb to 8,000 ft. on a heading of 150 deg. My first thought was.... why are we heading for Los Angeles ?

As we left the pattern and started to climb to 8,000 ft my anxious crew members (who could) crowded onto the flight deck waiting to see what our "Secret" orders were. The others were listening on the Intercom. I tore open the envelope and removed the instructions with a blank triplicate form to be filled out.

We were flying a "Fuel and oil consumption test". Our "Mission" was to log our exact engine performance for five hours and land at Fairfield/Suisun Air Field (now called Travis).....less than 50 miles away. "Oh what a relief" for now.

We were to fly to Bakersfield, slow turn around and cruise north to Williams (Shasta) and back south again at 8,000 ft using up the full time and landing at Fairfield at exactly 16:40. Just another training flight.... but this time a beautiful sightseeing tour of the clear San Joaquin valley. We all agreed now was a good time to eat or lunch and relax for the next few hours.

I really enjoyed acting as tour guide pointing out Mount Diablo, Hurst Castle and Monterey Bay with the Blue Pacific Ocean on the western horizon. As we turned around over the Grapevine and Tehachapi, Mount Whitney loomed against the eastern sky. Watching Highway 99 and its traffic and picking out Lemoore was easy from the 8,000 ft with only slight haze. While we couldn't see too well through the clouds over the Sierra mountains we knew Tonopah was just "over there", and Lake Tahoe and Sacramento and San Francisco Bay were easily recognized as we flew north to Redding and Williams. Our northern turn around gave a good view of Mt. Shasta and Mt.

Lassen and the Sonoma coast line, the Sacramento and Feather Rivers joining and winding their way into San Francisco Bay.

The Engineer's Flight Report listed exact Take-off time, RPM (Engine 1-2-3-4) Manifold Pressure (1-2-3-4) Mixture Control (1-2-3-4) Cylinder Head Temp. (1-2-3-4) Oil Press. (1-2-3-4) and Oil Temp. (1-2-3-4). New entries were recorded every 1/2 hr. of the flight. On my Pilot's Report were listed Average Indicated Air Speed for the first 2 hours of cruising (173 mph). Trim tab settings were recorded (Elev. 1 deg. up - Rudder 0 - Aileron 1 deg right). Cruise Power Setting (2100 rpm - Man. Press. 32" - Mixture Auto. Lean) maintained for duration of time listed. At 16:35 power was increased (Auto. Rich) for landing and touch-down time of 16:40. We were directed into a parking space facing the hangers and the engines were shut off at 16:45.

Our instructions were to leave our parachutes and take everything else off the plane we would need for our stay at this base, including guns (small arms), knives, binoculars, and thermos-jugs. A guard would be posted at the aircraft BUT... YOU PAY FOR YOUR SHORTAGES FROM HERE ON !

A truck was waiting to take us and our baggage to the briefing room, and then to our quarters. As I turned in our report forms I was given instructions to attend a briefing at 06:00 for further orders. All were free to use the Rec. Room and mess hall after selecting cots in the Transient Barracks.

Bill and Bert lost no time in finding a telephone and calling their wives rooming house (Nothing had been said about calls being restricted.... YET.)

At the briefing next morning several of the other crews were

given orders to board their planes and proceed to Hickam Field, Hawaii at specific departure times. The navigation procedure was spelled out with radio beacons from Fairfield to a ship halfway along the route and from there to Hawaii at the other end. It was to be a 12 to 13 hour flight (over water) and emergency help was to be available only IF NECESSARY. Radio transmission was to be restricted to EMERGENCY only. No one was sure where the "Japs" were but we knew they were listening.

My name was called last. Our plane had not passed the Fuel Consumption Test. We were to fly another 5 hr test next day after service crews checked and "adjusted" the carburetors. We were free for the rest of the day (Nov 9) and issued day passes. Bill and Bert's wives quickly drove to Fairfield to spend the rest of the day together. My folks still didn't have a telephone but I got to Stockton on the bus and Elma (My sister in law) took me to the ranch.

Next morning the folks drove me back to Fairfield thinking this would be our last visit before going "overseas". We loaded the plane for the second Fuel Test run. The log was filled in and everything recorded just as before. Our 5 hr flight at 8,000 ft over the same California scenery had lost a little of its excitement as clouds were drifting in from the Pacific but at least we were spending another day in (over) the USA.

The plane was taxied into the same parking place and again we climbed into the waiting truck for the ride to the briefing area and our barracks while the ground crew measured aviation fuel into our tanks.

Nov. 11 at 08:00 I was informed that the plane still didn't pass

the test. The solution was to install "Emergency Lean" fuel jets in the (4) carburetors. I was almost certain nothing had been done after the first test. They just wanted to double check the results.

No time was given as to how long the Jet change would take, but I was told to check in at 06:00 each morning for instructions. In the mean time we were free on Pass to enjoy a Thanksgiving with all the trimmings at home. Another Fuel Test flight was made on Nov 27th. The results were exactly the same for the 3rd time. Now I was sure nothing had been done to the plane. Other planes were taking off for the Pacific every day, but ours was waiting on the ground while we were enjoying free time in "Sunny California". None of us were really complaining.

It wasn't until Dec. 2nd that we took off on our 4th Fuel Test Flight over the same course. We knew something had been done this time. There were red decals in the windshield and on the throttle quadrant.... "DO NOT EXCEED ONE MINUTE AT MAX POWER SETTING". "ECONOMY LEAN JETS". "REPLACE JETS BEFORE ENTERING COMBAT". I couldn't detect any difference in the way the plane performed at cruise, and had no need to test it at Full Power anyway. The fuel used on this 4th test was well below the amount set for the trip to Hawaii, so now our "Secret" orders were cut for departure Dec. 5, 1944 together with 4 other B-24s and 2, B-25s with their crews.

The night take-off from Fairfield (with our full load of gas) was rather quiet as we realized our "vacation" was over and now we had to get on with the war. Everyone had checked his equipment to be sure we had everything we would need for the next ???

Most of us had brought along some non-GI items. Bill had his Kodak Ektar 35mm camera and extra film. I had my Argus 35mm camera

(modified) and film. I also put my Saxophone in with the baggage. Bill said he would like to play my Dad's trumpet, so we put it aboard. There were several machete type knives, some up to 30" long. We had LOTS of room but were supposed to have a weight limit. The food box had been prepared with Air Force lunches for each of us. The coffee jugs were filled and in place. Handed to us as we boarded the plane were the first "aerosol bombs" I had ever seen. They looked like ribbed tomatoe cans painted GI brown with a small tin pipe soldered into one end and bent down over the side with a blob of solder covering the end. Verbal instructions were to break off the pipe and set the can on the plane floor. Each area of the plane was to be "Fogged" with the Bug spray (DDT) cans after we got in the air. (One shot...no shut-off). We were also each given a small cardboard "Good luck box" printed "courtesy of your RED CROSS", which contained a cellophane wrapped sandwich, (prepared at least two days before), a candy bar and a Sunkissed Orange..... from Florida.

Our take-off climb to altitude was directly over the Golden Gate Bridge with its beautiful light outline. Night time blackouts were no longer required, but everyone was ready to turn the lights out when the "Air Raid" siren sounded. We watched the San Francisco lights until they faded into the horizon. Now all we could see were the stars and slight moonlight reflected off the deep blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. This is when you realize the importance of the Navigator. The radio was tuned to the Fairfield beacon and our initial heading kept us inside the beam until it was no longer heard. We rather expected to see at least one ship, but till now had seen none.

Bert plotted our position and time. Right on course. The radio was tuned to the next beacon. This was on a ship that was supposed to maintain a somewhat fixed location along the route. It was several minutes before we could actually hear its signal, but were not too alarmed: (We were told the Navy was on our side).

By this time most of the crew was sleeping as there wasn't too much to do but keep warm at the 8,000 ft. altitude. As we flew on, the ships radio beam was verified and the sun was beginning to light the sky and scattered cottony clouds. It was a different sunrise to all of us, with the sun rising "out of the water". Into this beautiful sight crept the whole reason for our being here... an enemy nation using the "Rising Sun" as their emblem.

We were told to be on the lookout for any ships and record them in our log. The only ship we saw was the beacon ship that confirmed our navigation was OK. As we crossed over the ship, the time was recorded and our ground speed (water speed) was established. Up to this point we were a little ahead of schedule. The ships radio beacon was becoming weaker as we continued on toward our Pearl Harbor "Island". Our watch for ships now was to include any planes. In our briefing we were told to be on the lookout for anything. While it had been quite some time since enemy activity along our route had been spotted, there were questions unanswered as to where they were and how many of them were active.

Huge billowy white clouds were scattered around us but were not dense enough to cause change of course or altitude as we "punched holes" through those in our way. Some held small amounts of rain but most were just "fog in the air". Most of the time the plane was flying itself on Auto-Pilot. Once the heading and

altitude were set into the control panel, automatic hydraulic controls were activated by the radio compass and altimeter. The steady tone of the four engines could lull you to sleep easily if your mind was not active.

I began looking back at my life and experiences with the questions... "How did I get here?".... "Why was I allowed special training beyond thousands of others maybe more qualified?"... "Why had I been allowed extra time with the folks before leaving California?".... "What was all this leading up to?"

There was only one answer that satisfied all my questions. From my earliest recollection I had been taught by words and demonstration and experience that there is a God who can be trusted as we trust Him. The Bible was an important part of all my education and I had to this point no reason to dispute the lessons from it. Just as the plane would fly into a cloud bank and I could not see past the window, the instruments told me I was still on course. My faith in the instruments was proven when the sun appeared on the other side of the cloud. From here on I was determined to keep trusting in my "Instruments" (GOD) who had proven to me that He was watching out for me.

Very soon I was to learn that one instrument was not always enough to rely on. It was best to keep an eye on ALL the instruments as well as the view out the window.

As our ETA (estimated time of arrival) drew near, everyone was excited and wanting to be the first to announce "Land-Ho". No one was more excited than I was when a mountain appeared out of the ocean dead ahead of us. Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor was our landing strip, but it was on the other side of Diamond Head so we

had a chance to see some of Hawaii from the air before entering the traffic pattern and landing. Still evident was the famous "grave yard" of Navy ships in the Harbor and many unrepaired areas of the Military installations. The devastation caused by that Pearl Harbor raid three years earlier (almost to the day) left scars that are still evident even as I write this 50 years later.

We left our guarded plane and were taken to transient quarters after a check-in briefing. We were interested in what our fuel consumption had been on the flight from Fairfield. When the tanks were filled, our refueling ticket showed that we had used only 1,435 gals. of our 2,450 gal. capacity. Our engineer suggested we sell our extra "fresh" gas to the Navy. My crew's respect for the much maligned "Flying Box-car" was improving. It could fly over water.

A bus ride around the harbor and into town gave us a brief ground view of the reconstruction in progress. Business was brisk with military personnel in evidence almost everywhere. Natives were conspicuous in their bright colored clothes. It seemed everyone was in a big hurry to get someplace. It may have been because the roads and streets were so narrow, but all the traffic seemed to be moving faster than in California. I was glad to return to the Officer's Quarters for a short nights sleep. Take-off was scheduled for 05:00. We had come a long way in one day. (Over 2,900 miles est.)

The 2nd day (Dec 6) was to take us to Canton Island with a short fuel stop at Palmyra Island six and one half hours south. After filling our fuel tanks (and our stomachs) we took off again into the tropical scattered high cloud filled sky. This second day from San Francisco was to take us across the Equator in our five and one half hour flight to Canton Island.

The coral runway on Canton began in the ocean and extended to the ocean at the other end. The middle was a few feet higher than each end so orders were to land in the first half of the runway, or get wet! On take-off there was an advantage (and an order) to reach flying speed in the first half of the runway and letting the ground fall away from you past the "high" point. There was a red flag half way up/down the runway that marked the spot you were to be in the air... or cut the power and put on the brakes for another try.

As I recall there were only a few scattered palm trees on the white corral island and NO grass. The highest "point" on the island was listed as 12 feet. The buildings were not what you would call permanent types, but did provide shelter from the hot sun and daily rains. The glistening white corral sand extended out under the rippling clear ocean water. Ideal wading, but not deep enough for swimming within a half mile in most places. After supper we spent about an hour playing in the salt water, then crawled onto our mosquito netted cots for another short night's rest.

Take-off was to be at 06:00 (sun just rising), and at low tide.... (longer runway. The take-off run was started with the wheels in the water! The engines were run up to take-off speed before the brakes were released. We were well clear of the hard packed corral runway when the red flag was passed.

Dec 7 was a short day. About 09:00 we crossed the International Date line and it became Dec 8th. This was the area made famous by the last radio report from Amelia Earheart who was scheduled to land on Howland Island just a few miles north of our course on her around the world flight. Before the landing at Tarawa we crossed the Equator again.

While the ground crew filled our gas tanks we ate our lunch and spent a few minutes exploring the beach where evidence of fierce fighting had re-taken the Island from the "Japs" at the cost of many lives. I was particularly interested in the rusting hulks of half submerged Tank Lighters and Higgins boats (Landing Craft) still scattered along the beach.

Maybe one or more of those was made and launched in Hickinbothom's Ship yard while I was working there. Concrete bunkers (gun emplacements) buried in the sand and grown over by fast growing jungle vegetation were silent now. Some still had rusted guns pointing through slit openings at the beach approach. There was no question in our minds as we walked along the sandy beach that we were entering the combat zone. Tarawa was indeed a jungle island (atoll). The air strip cut out of the jungle and maintained by the "CeeBees" (Construction Battalion) was quite a contrast to Canton.

As we left the jungle strip and headed for Guadalcanal the sky became almost more clouds than clear at our altitude. Once again we crossed the equator on our way to the Solomon Islands. About a half hour into the second leg of our 3rd days flight, the gyro compass was indicating a very different direction from the magnetic and the radio compass. This also controlled the artificial horizon indicator and of course the Auto Pilot. Relaxation time for me was over.

It was soon discovered that the vacuum pump that powered the Gyro instruments was not doing its thing. Blessin crawled under the instrument panel to check the lines and might have climbed out to #3 engine if there would have been an order to do so. As long as the magnetic and radio compass agreed, I could see no reason to

worry about it. We flew on through the clouds, and came out occasionally to verify that the wings were still level with what could be seen of the horizon and the crew settled back to their enemy watch and sightseeing.

I think this was the first time some of the crew had occasion to notice that the wings of our B-24 actually "flapped" in rough or turbulent air. The 110 ft. wing span was so designed that there could be as much as 20" rise (or fall) at the wing tip. This was enough to make the wing tip marker light disappear at times when watched from the top turret or waist window.

When we landed at Guadalcanal on the jungle air strip, it was the first time for me to land on runway "Marsdon" mats. An area was cut out of the trees and lush vegetation but there had not been time (or plan?) to construct a permanent runway. The CBs had leveled the existing ground and laced together steel plates to cover the whole runway. Some of these individual plates with their 3" holes may still be found (surplus) in use as car trailer ramps or trailer flooring, or truck headboards. They were and are really useful and durable material.

You don't forget landing on these mats. The noise is enough to scare you out of your wits, but they never seem to stay smooth or level. The noise is like driving down the highway at 100 miles an hour with one (or all) wheels on a line of reflectors. If some plates are slightly loose (and more are loose than tight) the soft ground under them squishes out and the plane is pulled first one way and then the other. At least if you stay on the mats you don't sink into the mud.

As instructed, the Carney Tower was contacted 1/2 hr. before

landing and clearance given to land. This gave them time to get any workers off the strip (and let them know we weren't an enemy plane?)

Our instrument problem was reported and while we slept, the ground crew, with the help of my engineer, replaced the vacuum pump and checked its operation.

We were instructed to stay close to the air strip and temporary operations buildings because the islands had not yet been cleared of all Japs. Most everyone was carrying a gun and/or a knife, so we elected to do the same. There were "fox holes" covered with palm logs, leaves and dirt at several places along the walk-ways between buildings, as well as machine gun bunkers that may have been formed by the Japs when they held the area. The ground was wet from the frequent rains and the air was hot and sticky... just the right conditions for LOTS of BIG HUNGRY mosquitoes. The mosquito netting hung over our cots cut off any whisper of breeze (that might have been) but the sound of the mosquitoes dictated keeping them tucked in.... tight.

The Dec 9th take-off from the rattling mats of Carney Field was at 08:00 and our course was to be over many scattered islands on our way to Biak, New Guinea. We were told that Japs still held many of the islands, but at our altitude they (probably ?) wouldn't be able to do us harm. We were free to alter course and altitude and asked to report any shooting and from what exact location. If any action was reported, there would be rather drastic air strikes plotted quickly. In fact we were not to be very far from some more or less "routine" enemy targets that we didn't find out about until later.

We were now definitely in the War Zone.

The gunners began to get a little uneasy when they learned of

maybe getting shot at with no ammunition in their guns yet. I tried to calm them by suggesting my plan to dodge into the ever-present clouds. You can be sure they were all watching in all directions.

Radio beams and signals were not to be trusted. Even with coded frequency changes almost every day, the Japs were finding ways to send false signals on our frequency to lead us astray. Navigation and ground observation led us to Toughy Tower at Biak with no problems.

We were ordered to remove all our personal things from the plane as I parked it in a somewhat protected clearing. A practice ordered early in the war was to scatter planes on the ground to prevent strafing or diving enemy planes from lining up on more than one or two in a row.

This completed my first "mission", to deliver B-24L #44-41696 to Biak, New Guinea from Fairfield/Suisun California. I was given a signed receipt for the plane dated Dec. 9th, just four days from Fairfield over a LOT of water.

J U N G L E T R A I N I N G

The next morning it became apparent that "OUR #696" was not really ours at all. I'm sure all of us were expecting to take this plane into Combat as "our" plane. It was not to be. After breakfast the 10 of us climbed aboard an aged ATC (Air Transport Command) C-47 transport plane (cargo version of a DC-3) with all our belongings. The door was latched and we taxied into position for take-off toward the ocean. I noticed that the 2 engines were not "run up" for checking, as should have been normal procedure. With only a brief pause, we were bouncing down the runway at full throttle. The tail came up and..... finally the wheels cleared the runway.

We were sitting on our duffle bags (no passenger seats) in the cargo area where we could see only the sky through two small windows about five feet above the floor on each side. We were in the air about 600 ft over the water when black oil smoke began pouring past the window from the right engine. The crew chief, third man of the 3 man crew, was still in the pilot's compartment when the co-pilot first saw the smoke.

I can guess the pilot's conversation may have been brief as they started their emergency action. Through the open compartment door came the crew chief, stumbling between and over our baggage as he raced back to the cargo door and kicked it open. My (Ex) MP was sitting on his equipment right beside the open door, saw the water and also could see the runway not too far behind us. As the crew chief grabbed hold of his duffle bag, Cpl. Prochniak set tight and yelled

"What do you think you're doing?" The ATC chief screamed

"We'er going to ditch and everything has to be thrown out!"

Without a moments hesitation Steve yelled

"If anything goes out, you go first!"

While this exchange was taking place, the bad engine was feathered and a slow left turn with emergency power on the left (lower) engine brought us back to a rough but safe landing.

If any of our equipment had been thrown into the ocean, we all knew there would be no replacing it for maybe months, and some could never be replaced. We all gave Steve, (as well as the pilots) a rousing cheer when we landed. Some of us also knew he could have been called up for "Insubordination" if the transport pilot had not brought the plane back on the runway.

Next day we learned that the smoking engine had just been overhauled, and the plane had not been "Tested" (run in). It was suspected that one piston had not been installed properly. If the pilot would have "run the engine up" at the end of the runway like he should have, he probably wouldn't have tried to take off. Our equipment was carried aboard another C-47 (also well used) and following normal procedures, we were delivered to Nadzab, Lae New Guinea for Jungle Training Dec 12, 1944.

All the training in the U.S. had served it's purpose well, but the next 15 days in the steamy New Guinea mountain jungle was to impress each of us more than any "simulation" could possibly accomplish in the U.S.

This was to be our first association with Australian soldiers serving as instructors. Since then I have been with and watched many Aussies in action. The first thing most everyone notices, is

they do not know what FEAR is. They are the most independent and resourceful "blokes" you will ever meet. Crocodile Dundee may be considered Hollywood Fantasy, but I've met dozens of Aussies that live the part every day. It took me almost the whole time I was in the Southwest area to feel I could safely understand their normal conversation. They called it "The Kings English" but they have a way of making 'pay' sound like 'pie' and 'mate' sound like 'might'.

One hot afternoon we followed our guide down the 'trial' into the steamy 'bush' (jungle) to learn first hand what trees and bushes were safe to eat and what was poison; how to get a drink of safe water from certain large leaf plants; how to cut your way through the tangled vines and lush ferns with the most important tool issued, and certainly the most reliable, the machete. From digging in the ground for roots to cutting down coconuts; from slicing meat to opening cans, (or enemies) this was your "Survival" tool.

When cutting your way through brush and vines, you might expect certain "vines" to have two beady eyes on them. Be sure to cut off the 'snakes' head.... first !

For about an hour, six of us were following our guide, rather closely listening for his instructions and comments and watching his quick demonstrations. As we paused to examine some special plant feature he had pointed out, our guide just vanish from sight. This was part of the training plan, but we had no idea what to expect. There were no footprints on the rotting jungle floor. There was no opening through the underbrush that we could detect. Birds and a couple of monkeys could be heard in the tree tops but could not be seen through the mass of leaves and branches.

After about 15 minutes of hunting, waiting and discussion, the

six of us decided it best to head for camp. I won't tell you how long it took us to find our way back to the open clearing and the road, but our "Fearless Guide" was waiting for us beside the road with a stop watch in his hand and a smile on his face. Next day our training included how to keep up with our guide, and an advanced course in "Boy Scout" tracking jungle style, as well as how to leave a trail someone could follow to find (rescue) you.

There were quite a number of shiny black natives, both men and women, throughout the camp and training area wearing only cloth skirts. Any cloth was acceptable; if it had any color it was more prized. One was wearing a piece of quilted B-24 cockpit lining with a big safety pin in front. We were given strict orders NOT to let them carry anything of ours, or to let them do laundry, which was really something they all begged to do in their "Pigeon English". If they got their hands on anything, you would likely never see them, or it again. Some of the officers assigned to the base did use them for maids or domestic work but it was always under CLOSE supervision.

The Aussies were most unhappy with the "Yanks" who persisted in offering to pay for this "help". The Aussies had been conscripting all the native men (boys) for one year Military service. For their service they were given food and shelter. At the end of their "service" time they were "pied" with a few coins.

As each service man marched away from the "pie master" with his shiny silver coins, he had to march past several long tables set up with stacks of bright colored cloth, caps, shoes, belts, blankets, double edge razor blades, (no razor) knives, spoons, picture post cards, tin cups, pretty buttons, safety pins (all sizes)... in fact

it was like an auction super market that they had never seen before. It was reported that NONE of the discharged natives went back to their tribe with more than one or two SMALL coins. Just as well, because there was nothing to use the money for in the jungle except wear it in their ear or nose. When the Yanks came and started passing out "Tips" of 10 cents or a nickle, this was more than the drafted natives were getting for a whole years service. This was really upsetting the economy, and the "Aus-try-lians".

There were demonstration classes on gathering food to eat including monkeys, rats, snakes and pigs, and ways to cook using banana leaves and hot rocks. We had real "target" practice with our 45 pistols and decided that it was a waste of time and ammunition to try to shoot down coconuts after several of the group tried and failed.

None wanted to try and climb for them but a four foot tall native was watching, and got up nerve enough to approach me and indicated he would like to "feel" my 24" knife. With the group of us together, I thought he couldn't get too far away with it, so drew it from the leather sheath and before I could offer him the handle, he grabbed the razor sharp blade and held it with the handle against his bare stomach and the sharp edge facing him. His eyes sparkled as he quickly ran his thumb all the way from the hilt to the sharp tip and back.

My first thought was "What Have I Done? How am I going to get my knife back without hurting someone?"

He darted out of our circle and ran for the coconut tree. With the big knife behind the tree and holding both ends he actually "walked" to the top of that tree while we looked up at him with our

mouths open. Next thing we saw was coconuts falling like rain. He "walked" and slid down the tree with his dirty skirt ("Lob-Lob") flapping in the air.

To my utter surprise, he ran up to me smiling from ear to ear and held out the knife with both hands like an offering to his God. What do you do on such an occasion? I tried to thank him and offered him the only thing that came to mind.... coconuts. He seemed delighted and ran off into the "Bush" with two coconuts. That night we got another rewarding experience; opening fresh coconuts with our knives.

As I have often looked back on my service experiences, there is one afternoon that I will never forget. I count it as the most important "lesson" for me and my crew. It was not my plan, but without a doubt it convinced me that "God was my (our) co-pilot".

As I indicated before, the B-24 bomber was almost always looked down on by "hot shot" pilots and crews. Called "box cars" and "Flivers" (they were made by Ford) and "ugly" and "underpowered", stories were everywhere of this planes falling out of the sky. My training in the B-24 had proved to me that there just couldn't be any real reason for these assessments.

As part of our Jungle Training we were to fly an actual combat plane, with all its armament and heavy shielding in place, over the jungle and mountains of New Guinea on sort of familiarization flights. After about an hour of exploring the coast line at 300 feet, we headed up a small river and I realized that the mountains on both sides of us were climbing faster than we were.... and they were getting too close to try and turn around. I could see a slight vee in the mountain range ahead and increased the power to

emergency setting as I carefully turned for the lowest spot. We didn't have time to take up crash positions; in fact everyone was looking out his window at the tall trees below. Believe me, I was looking at the tree tops too as we crossed over them at what seemed to be 25 ft. It didn't take but a few seconds for me to realize that the whole crew thought I had planned this to give them a thrill. They wanted to "Do it again".

As I caught my breath, we climbed to about 3,000 ft and headed back toward our field clearing. Most of the crew were resting or talking about what they had seen, and how easy it was to count the coconuts from 10 (?) ft. I looked over at Bill and could tell he was almost as shaken up as I was.

We were not due to land for another 30 min so I suggested we try feathering (stopping) one engine. The # 3 engine was stopped. This is the one the radio operator sees through his window. He jumped up with a start and tapping me on the shoulder, pointed to the dead engine and stuttered

"The engine is not turning !" I just nodded and said

"Yes, I know".

By this time the whole crew were aware that one engine was not working. We flew on for a few minutes, losing only about 100 ft of altitude as I slowly turned first one way and then another. I told Bill to start it up again and I gained the lost altitude quickly.

When I was sure everyone was breathing easier again, I told Bill to try feathering #2 engine, on the other side. We again turned first one way and then around again without too much altitude loss with Bill at the controls.

I don't know why, but I reached up and feathered #4. We were now

flying on two engines.... and the plane didn't fall out of the sky. After a few minutes, everyone was getting excited. This excercise was turning into a learning experience for me too. The plane really didn't handle much differently than I had expected. I turned to Bill and he anticipated my question. Shall we feather another? With a nod of his head he shut down the third engine. We were flying in ONE engine!

The landing field was well in sight and we still had almost 1000 ft altitude when the engines were started one by one until all four were operating as we entered the landing pattern and parked the plane. I really didn't realize how excited and impressed the crew was. By the time we got back to our separate quarters, it seemed everyone on the base "knew"..... "We had flown for 30 minutes on 1 engine and buzzed the tree tops at 10 ft". I was expecting to get called up to operations for an explanation, but the story as they told it must have been passed off as just another rumor.

From that day on, my whole crew were convinced that they would go anywhere in a B-24..... as long as I was Pilot. There were to be many times during the next 8 months of combat when some were asked to substitute on other crews, (a regular occurrence) and did refuse to fly with other pilots if it would cause them to miss the next flight with "us". I have no way of knowing how many combat crews stayed together during their whole tour of duty, but I do know that ours was the only one in our 424th squadron while we were there.

Our first "combat mission" was flown from Nadzab, New Guinea to Rabaul on one of the "bypassed" Jap held (?) New Briton Islands. Our mission was to drop bombs on their air strip to keep any supply planes from landing or taking off. This "bombing" had been going

on for many months and was more of a practice class for new bomber crews than a strategic necessity. Our formation bombing succeeded in blowing bigger and deeper holes in a clearing that could only be used to land a helicopter on, if they had any, which they didn't.

If there were any Japs still on the Island, (and later there proved to be) they wisely kept out of sight of the routine bomb target. It was determined many months earlier that the small group of Japs still "holding" the island had no useable planes or even effective anti-aircraft guns still operational, so unless naval supply ships or native fishing boats could sneak help to them without our seeing them, our "mission" was considered safe practice. We were expected to look for any signs of activity on or around the island and report in detail for future planing.

This was the first APO address that mail was to catch up to us. My first packet of mail was to include a "V" mail letter from home that stunned me. My Pilot brother Lloyd had been killed in a B-25 plane crash "somewhere in S. Carolina". There were no details. I started several letters, trying to express my feelings to Mom and Dad, but threw each away when I realized that what they needed most was assurance that I was being cared for by the God they had taught me to trust. With that letter went my prayer that they would understand. They did.

Dec 27th orders were to

"Proceed AIC to APO 713-1 to join 360th Service Group".

This meant boarding another C-47 on the 31st, with five other replacement crews and moving up to Wewak on the North East coast of New Guinea for a temporary stopover. It was late afternoon when we were assigned a tent and instructed to be sure we knew where the log

and leaf covered bomb shelters were between each tent. This camp was only a few hundred yards from the "Perimeter" and we were to be alert for Japs sneaking into "our area". Some had been caught trying to get food, but they could be expected to take anything within reach.

I chose a cot about 10 ft. from a log and dirt covered fox hole dug out of the jungle soil large enough for six or seven to crowd into. Our tent covered about fifteen cots, with the sides tied up for ventilation, and ropes stretched all around to pegs just waiting to trip someone in the dark. With all my equipment under the cot and my loaded 45 in its holster on my shoulder, and a flashlight within reach, I tucked in the mosquito netting for some rest. (?) Everyone was restless and some just felt better if they were talking. It was probably 23:00 before the area became quiet enough to sleep.

About 10 min to midnight a shot rang out in the jungle. Then another and the air raid siren started its windup. Shots were heard from all along the perimeter. At the sound of the first shot, I jumped for the shelter with my flashlight in hand. As I dived into the opening, I saw two eyes looking at me but there were four people behind me pushing to get under cover. When we were all inside I recognized the two eyes belonged to my radio operator, "grandpa" Cpl. Yuhasz. His first words were

"What took you so long?"

After about 15 min the all clear was sounded and we crawled out of the dirty shelter. There were still some shots from different places out in the jungle, but at least some of us did get a little rest before get-up time. At breakfast it was announced that the

"Fireworks" was a celebration of New Years Eve by the perimeter guards to let the Japs know they were not sleeping on the job. (And let off a little steam).

Our Jan '45 started out with a BANG.

This transient jungle camp was used as a holding area for crews moving to combat group assignments, as we were, and also for individual service personnel being re-assigned to different units or areas or even back to the States. I'm glad we didn't have to stay in this camp very long. Most of the "campers" had been through combat campaigns and actual battles. They were "survivors" who still had to look forward to unknown assignments with unknown groups at unlisted locations for the duration of the war. The prevailing attitude was loud and clear. I've had enough! I want to go home! EVERYTHING was wrong; the food, the beds, the clothes, the dirt, the rain, the mud, the bugs, the water, the officers, the orders, the battle plans, the guns, the ammunition, the communications, the entertainment, the pay, the distorted news; we were all LOOSERS!

Is it any wonder I was anxious to get my crew away from this camp QUICKLY ?

Our assignment was to the 424th squadron of the 307th Bomb Group, 13th Army Air Force as a B-24 crew (10 man). On Jan 3, 1945 an ATC plane delivered us to Pitoe Air Strip at Morotai, one of the Halmahara Islands about 3 deg. North of the Equator. It had been recovered from the Japs, (at least our part of it), less than 6 months earlier, but it was considered a "secure" base. We were told to expect to "move up" to Okinawa as soon as it was cleared (of Japs) for us. We were not told that it was still being used by them.

C O M B A T U N I T A S S I G N M E N T

Pitoe Strip was two excellent parallel 6000 ft runways graded and paved by the CeBes with packed crushed coral, and a control "tower" atop 4 tall palm trees about midway between the strips. Visibility was not hampered by windows, or roof over the treetop platform at first, but were added later. While most vegetation was kept clear for a good distance on either side of the runway, daily rains could turn the unpaved edges into muddy traps. There were "Cletrack" service tractors always standing by to tug stuck planes back onto the runway and then to the parking revetments. Pilots soon learned to stay alert and STAY ON THE PAVEMENT.

The prevailing winds were from the Malucca Straights on the West, so most of our (overloaded) take-offs were over the peninsula through a clearing to the water. To the North East of the runway was the Australian Fighter group with their Spitfire and dive bomber planes scattered out under the trees. A little farther east was the base hospital and prisoner compound. There were no permanent buildings anywhere on the spread-out base that I knew of. Beyond the hospital compound a considerable distance into the jungle was the perimeter guarded by soldiers 24 Hrs a day.

Our planes were parked in scattered revetments between trees along the south side of the runways. Besides our Long Ranger Bomb group there were many other outfits using this area as their base. The only ones I came in contact with or knew about were the Australians, the Hospital, the guard units, the Cee Bees, the Navy, a supply outfit, a rescue group, an Anti-Aircraft Battalion and the Motor Pool. Each had their own guarded camp area hidden under

the many types of palm, mahogany, and balsa trees. Exploring the island was not considered a healthy passtime, as guards were everywhere watching for Jap spys day and night.

From our plane area to our squadron base camp was about six miles west along a narrow, high crowned, coral pavement winding its way between the trees and underbrush. Thanks to the CeeBees these (Main) roads provided access by Jeep and 6 X 6 trucks to the Air Strip from the different outfits. Such locations as the Anti-Aircraft guns, (which were moved quite frequently) were connected by unpaved bulldozed dirt (mud) roads coming into the paved road at odd places. Vehicles entering the pavement from these muddy paths tracked the slick mud for yards making it a real test of skill to cross these intersections without slipping off into the side ditches. All drivers soon learned to drive in the exact center of the slick roads, even though local rules were to keep on the LEFT side when passing an oncoming vehicle. The mid-day tropical rains didn't usually last for more than an hour, so the hot sun following the bursting clouds did a pretty good job of drying what mud had not washed off into the side ditches.

Our tent area was only about 200 yds. from a wide Bay used for Navy supply transfer and fueling, and their short dock was about a mile farther west along "our" narrow beach. In fact they had erected a chain link fence extending out into the water to help the guards keep "whoever" from their stacks of waterproofed supply containers and fuel and oil drums. The palm trees were so thick that some had to be removed to make room for our four man tents, set up in odd rows with sandy walkways between for our "Home away from home".

Our "city" included the Operations tent, the Supply tent, the Dispensary tent, the double Mess tent divided for officers and enlisted men, an Officer's Club tent, and the Enlisted Men's Club tent. Strategically located were topless (and moved frequently) latrines. There were showers, (with several overhead 50 gal drums of rainwater 'solar' heated), an all denominational chapel tent, an outdoor (what else) theater shared by anyone who could come, and even a "snack bar" tent. For a while the Red Cross had a big circus tent set up to provide shelter for the traveling entertainment groups.

We even had a Cat Diesel generator set that provided electrical power for the kitchen refrigerators and lights strung throughout the area. Most tents had a radio plugged in to an extension cord.

Most of our sleeping tents were wood framed on rough wood floors. The wood was sawed by the CeeBees from local trees, mostly mahogany. It seemed a shame to use this beautiful wood for framing lumber, but it was abundant, and available and easy to work with, even when green. When we arrived at the squadron, it was before the crew we were to replace had been moved out, so Bill, Bob, Bert and I unpacked our things in a tent tied to four palm trees on the sandy beach. It was across the road (main street) from the more desirable "residential" officers area. When the sun was shining brightly after a rain, it was not uncommon to have 2 to 5 inch crabs raceing (sideways) up the beach and through our beach tent. We only stayed in this tent for about 10 days until a wood floor and frame tent became available.

The enlisted men had their own "Tent City" on down "Main Street" past the Mess Tent, Supply tent and Dispensery. The reason the wood

tent floors were built up above the sand became obvious when the rains came down and the water ran over our streets to the ocean.

We soon learned to catch rainwater in whatever was available for washing. Tin helmets, which also served as wash basins, and oxygen tanks with an end cut off were tied or propped around the tent roofs to catch the water. Our drinking water was only from Lister Bags hung from trees at various locations and filled with "purified" (stinky) chlorinated (and sometimes (?) filtered) well water hauled in by a water tank truck from someplace.

Our mess tent was open almost all the time. We had some of the best cooks and bakers on the Island. Visiting officers and dignitaries seemed to come from everywhere to enjoy our "reconstituted" meals and in particular our bread! There was located somewhere on the island, a bakery that was supposed to do the baking for all the outfits with delivery on schedule. It was soon discovered that what they delivered required a saw or a sharp machete to slice (chip) it apart and even buried under steaming gravy, it was like chewing on gravel. There was no way it could be used to make sandwiches, which made up most of our lunch on every flight. The soft fresh bread we all enjoyed with Spam, cheese, Orange Marmalade, (from New Zealand) or jam (with seeds) was a secret that our baker provided from dry flour, dried milk powder, dried egg powder and skill in a gasoline heated oven while we were sleeping.

Breakfast was available almost any hour, because flights were scheduled to begin at midnight or noon or any time between. Other meals were planned and served from the steam table until the pot ran out. Always on our table were "milk" (condensed cans) salt, pepper,

sugar and marmalade, referred to as "atabrine jam" because of its bitter orange taste and Yellow/orange color. Eggs were scrambled (dried) and most meat was either canned or salted. Spam was served fried with eggs or pancakes; with bread and gravy; boiled with dumplings or in soup or stew. Coffee was boiled in 30 gal GI cans with a laddle used to dip it out; always HOT. Canned vegetables and fruit were part of the regular meals. The cooks were always told of our flight take-off times and managed to have our lunch boxes and coffee ready for the early GI 6 X 6 ride to the flight line.

Our Operations Officer was Captain Carl S. Looker. Not only did he brief us before each mission, he many times was lead pilot of our squadron of six planes. We soon learned to respect his judgement and skill and all were impressed with his understanding of team spirit.

It was only after many missions with him that I learned of his involvement in the early bombings of the Ploesti Oil refinery in Rumania. It is recorded that in early June of 1942 there were thirteen B-24s sent out on the first mission and only seven made it to the recovery field in Iraq. A year later, Aug 1, 1943, several bomber groups were brought together and 164 B-24s took off before dawn from North Africa to fly low level (50 to 300 ft.) 7 hours to the heavily defended refinery target. Twenty seven minutes over the target and the 7 hour flight home with angry fighters swarming along the entire route, had reduced the returning planes to 111 (53 lost).

Captain Looker was a pilot that didn't talk about his promotion to Major for bringing his plane home from that mission, but it was rumored (and evidenced) that for some reasons he had been reduced to Captain, not once but several times since that mission. I suspect

it could have been because of his attitude of being "one of the boys" rather than displaying the "Superior" stance his Commanding officers expected.

F I R S T M I S S I O N S

My first combat mission with the squadron was Jan 12, 1945 to a Bivouac Area called Nuzon below Manila. I was listed as Spare Ship, which was always scheduled to replace any plane that could not take off for some reason. In briefing we were shown the most recent aerial pictures of the target and the plan of approach was detailed with instructions of altitude and break-away. Our 424th squadron was to lead the bomb run with the 370th, then the 372nd, and the 371st following in order; 24 planes on all. Take off was started at 04:00 with 1 min between planes. As we taxied to the approach, each plane would alternate runways; when the signal light was flashed at the lead plane he would start his take off run. Then the second plane would line up on the other runway and wait 30 sec for the green light to start his run. This would continue back and forth until all planes were in the air. If for any reason a plane was not ready (or able) to move into take-off position, the next would take his place. Thus it was that my spare ship position moved me onto the runway for # 6 position, replacing someone ahead with a difficulty.

Once in the air with our full load, it was recommended we cut back on power and climb to cruise altitude while on course to a designated assembly point. It was most unusual to see any of the 24 planes in the air after 15 min of flying. Of course at 04:00 it was still dark, and would be for another 2 hours, but this was the case even in daylight. When cruise altitude was reached, maybe 30 min or more after take-off, power could be reduced to save gas and still keep proper air speed. Between 08:15 and 09:00 at 8,500 feet we were to be over the assembly coordinates. It was always a thrill to

look out the window and see one, two or three of our planes appear out of the "blue" and throttle up to join the circling formation. Being last to take off didn't always mean being last in formation. At 09:00 the leader headed for the target with whoever was in his formation. If someone was late, whatever the reason, the group went on because to wait would use up everyone's gasoline that was measured with scant extra; measured by the gallon and used by the minute. We all started with 3,100 gal. and that was to get us back to Pitoe and our parking spot.

Close formation flying was NOT the way to save gas. The loaded "boxcars" could work the pilot to utter exhaustion pulling, twisting and toeing the controls while throttling up and back trying to keep a 10 ft space between your wing tip and the next one that was trying to do the same with another plane. The foot brakes don't work in the air! Reduce power and the plane slows (and falls); increase power and the plane SLOWLY gains speed (and rises). Our lead pilot, Capt. Looker was well aware of the extra gas consumption and the increased pilot fatigue so chose to keep his squadron in loose formation, as long as there was no enemy air activity.

On the bomb run we closed it up and followed his lead over the target. There was a scattered cloud cover over most of the assigned target, but enough ground was seen to identify the target area and we followed the lead bombardier in releasing our load through the clouds. At 8,750 ft altitude we couldn't see the bombs hit through the clouds or even be sure they hit the right place, but our job now was to follow our leader in close formation. With the bomb load gone, the plane was easier to control. All were alert for any enemy planes that might be in the sky. The radio was used only in an

emergency, so while everyone was listening, all inter-plane signals were visual.

When it was decided that we were safely clear of the target area the signal was given and each plane was cleared to head for "home". Again it was not unusual to lose sight of the other planes after about 15 min. We had been in the air for over seven hours but were on our way back, with another 5 or 6 hrs yet to go.

Still at about 8,000 ft it was found that pointing the nose down for a few hundred feet, almost 50 or 60 miles of air speed could be gained while slowly reducing the power setting to minimum cruise and cutting the prop speed to 1,800 RPM (or even less) the altitude and speed could be held for hours. In fact it didn't matter if we did lose some altitude as long as the speed kept up without jockeying the controls. Most storm centers could be skirted and this even increased our ground speed at times. This was our unwritten rule for establishing the LR (Long Ranger) record of some of the longest missions flown over the Pacific in the Buick powered - Ford planes - built by Women - called the Consolidated Liberator B-24.

By the time we could identify our Island, it was almost sundown and there was only one other plane in sight off to the right; again out of "nowhere", as the runway was lined up for a straight-in power on approach. The plane was taxied into its stall and ten weary but happy "youngsters" unloaded their gear and tossed it into a waiting 6 X 6 truck. We rolled through the trees to our tent quarters.

First stop; the operations tent for de-briefing. Our written report was filed listing what we had seen and any damage that we might have sustained. A "chit" or ticket was given each crew member for a 2 oz shot of liquor at the dispensary. These chits were just

like money, only more tradeable than cash. Then to our tents to get out of our flight suits and into relaxing clothes.

Evenings were not as hot as the daytime so "sun tan" pants and shirts with low shoes were acceptable "uniform" for the "mess hall" meal. Few of the crew tent side walls were ever let down so there really wasn't much privacy when dressing (or undressing). Rarely were WACKS or WAVES or nurses seen in our area but there were occasional entertainers escorted through our "city", usually by Staff Officers with (maybe) some advance notice.

Unless there was an emergency strike mission called, like a report of enemy ships sighted in our operating range, it was intended for each crew to followed a schedule of two days off for each day flying. My days off were spent cleaning the tent area and fixing up (putting together) tables, chairs, desks, shelves etc. from crate lumber or whatever was available that someone else had not found a use for. There were always letters to write and time to walk down to the waters edge or even wade in (always on the alert for the crabs) or explore the beach from the Navy Chain link fence on the west to the guard posted on the east protecting an Anti-Aircraft and machine gun emplacement.

Probably the most common passtime was playing cards. There always seemed to be three or four games going; some with what to me, were high stakes, but usually a game for fun that could include me. As many games as I have watched, behind "skilled" players at a table, I have never been able to understand how some can look around the table and effectively call each card their opponents are holding. Playing the game of Hearts, which was a popular game with our group, it was not uncommon to play around the table three or

four times and have the dealer call the game by stating how many points each player was holding.

The planes weren't always allowed to rest two days between missions. Necessary maintenance was performed by the ground crew mechanics who worked in crews on ever changing schedules. This made it very unusual for one flying crew to be assigned the same plane on each mission. Any serious problem requiring engine, hydraulic, landing gear, brake or control surface repair could take two or three days (or more) to correct and might even require testing the plane in flight; even "slow timing" (breaking in a new engine) before releasing it for combat. Out of all my 47 missions, there was only once that I could not take off in the plane assigned to me. The engine was repaired and I used it (#236) on my next scheduled mission 2 days later.

There must have been a shortage of Air crews because I was again scheduled (as spare plane) on Jan 14, only the second day after my first mission. The target was Grace Park Air/Drome Administration & Barracks area, on the North edge of Manila. Anti-Aircraft guns were known to protect the target, so our bombing altitude was set at 15,500 ft. Our 424th Squadron of 6 planes was to follow in 4th place; tail end behind the 371st, 372nd and 370th. This mission was going to teach me that Anti-Aircraft guns usually fire on the leading planes to get their range corrections, and can (and do) miss more often than they hit. By the time the following planes get into drop position, the range can be expected to be "right on".

My take off time was set at 04:05 with (30) 100 lb Frag. Cluster bombs and 3,100 gal of gasoline loaded. Again we were to assemble over the west side of Naso Point but at 9,750 ft and before 08:00

when the squadron would climb in formation to 16,000 ft on the way to the target area. It would take us 1 hr and 45 min to get to the target from there, giving the bombardier plenty of time to arm each bomb cluster and be sure the release latches were in order.

Again heavy clouds were scattered below us, but most of our course to the target was over islands that could be identified between the cloud banks. At this altitude everyone was wearing their oxygen masks and had their flying suits plugged in to the electric heater outlets. There was radio silence but everyone was watching for possible enemy fighter planes. Some were spotted out of our range and were watched closely.

As the leading squad formation dropped their bombs, we could see the bursts of shells from the Anti-Aircraft guns well below them. Close behind them were the 372nd and the bursts seemed a little closer, but still not up to our altitude. As the 370th dropped their load, the shells were bursting way above and it seemed on both sides. Our lead pilot, Capt. Looker had been in this position before. He had lowered our formation about 500 ft and started the bomb run a few hundred yards to the left of the leading group. When we dropped our bombs and turned away the flack was all above us... about 500 ft. and only fell on us like hail, doing no damage that we could tell.

In (fairly) close formation we headed for "home" gaining speed as we came down to our more comfortable cruising altitude. Still alert for any fighter planes, it was evident they were not up to tangling with us now. We were to learn later that the Japs were running out of planes faster than they could make them, so their objective quite often, was to keep their planes in the air and away

from our bombs, until they could use them in an offensive "surprise" attack. The planes we had seen earlier had been in the air too long to still have enough gas to chase us. Their problem now was where to land after their runway and base had been bombed, if our target was their base.

It was 4 days later that a mission was called to a Jap Supply Area called Miti, less than an hour south on our same Island Group. This was an island that had been bypassed on the drive north to the Philippines. The Japs that still held the island were (in effect) our prisoners, as long as their supplies were cut off and they had no planes or landing field. The only way new supplies could get to them was by ship or submarine or native fishing boats and we were watching close enough to detect an increase in their stock of new crates or fuel drums.

At 07:00 the target was clearly visible. The first plane was at 7,500 ft and the next at 7,800 ft about 05 min behind the leader, and the third at 8,100 ft a few min behind him. The fourth came in at the 7,500 ft level 05 min later with the fifth and sixth each 300 ft above like stair steps. This was to keep any ground fire from locking into one range. Also each bombardier was to observe the bomb pattern of the planes ahead and make any corrections to hit what had been missed. This was the FIRST time Bob had a chance to actually pick out a target and hit it. In formation bombing, it all depends on the lead plane. If he doesn't line up for a direct hit, there is little chance any of the following 18 or 24 planes will do more than come close (relatively) because they are "supposed" to drop when HE drops.

Back at operations briefing Bob was happy to report "HE" had hit

a rack of fuel barrels under the trees and left them blazing.

Jan 23rd, 26th, 29th and Feb 4th at 12:30 each day we were over Manila with our bomb loads. Targets were the Caviti Sea plane base which was destroyed (and probably a lot of ocean fish) and Canacao Point installations. I can't be sure now if we hit the primary target on each mission, as there were always secondary, tertiary, and last resort targets listed if the clouds obscured the primary target. We were well aware of thousands of our own people in and around Manila, so were very careful to only drop on the military installations.

On several of the flights over Manila we scattered cases of leaflets printed in English, Tagalag, and Japanese warning all who could to take cover at 12:30 each day to avoid our bombing. It was stated that our objective was to destroy Military Facilities only.

Corregidor had been a continuing bomb target for over a month. The 5th Air Force "Jolly Rogers" bomb group, ("Mc Arthur's Pets") had been making runs twice a day, everyday, from their base at Leyte, only 2 hours away. Our 13th Air Force "Long Rangers" joined in for the 12:35 daily plastering from 7 hours away. Is it any wonder we were feeling rather jealous of their racking up two missions a day for our one over the same target? Our 13th was not even mentioned when McArthur gave all credit to the 5th for "softening up" the enemy for "His Return".

On Feb 11 and 14 our 24 planes pounded the famous Corregidor Island fortress in Manila Bay. Our target was detailed "Gun Emplacements" that had been re-activated. On each mission was sent a cameraman with his gear to record the target area and the bomb pattern for study and evaluation by Operations officers. The

cameraman was not a member of any one crew; he was the odd man that could choose which crew he wanted to go with. I felt it a compliment that on most of my missions, the cameraman chose to ride with us.

The pictures taken of Corregidor, after weeks of continuous bombing, make you wonder how anything could possibly be alive on the island. In fact the only life on the island WAS in the tunnels that had been dug all through it. This fortress had been designed as a self contained city with quartermaster supplies, hospital, troup barracks, command headquarters (McArthur's with secret escape passage) Gen. George Moore's HQ, signal corps. and finance offices, fuel storage area, and Philippine President Quezon's headquarters.

Of course at this time the Japs had possession and and were using it (and its supplies) against us. This constant bombing had effectively closed all the entrances (and escape openings), (we thought) as well as destroyed the guns (and those that were using them). The surface facilities; landing field, water tower, golf course, parade ground, barracks, supply railroad and many docks around the island had been completely destroyed by this time.

Jap fighter planes (Zeros) were not a problem to us in this area. For every Zero we saw there were 10 or more P-38s or F-4U Corsairs watching out for us. In fact I think our fighter escorts were disappointed when the Zeros would not attack our formations. It was about this time that McArthur had "returned" to the Manila area but ground fighting was to continue street by street and building by building before it was again "safe" for those who had survived the more than three years of oppressive occupation.

By Mid-January we moved out of our Beach Tent and into a wood framed and floored tent on "Executive Row" that had been vacated by

a returning crew. One afternoon a group of officers were gathered in another tent playing cards as I watched (as usual). A messenger walked up to the side of the tent and asked if there was a Lt. Vanciel in the group. I told him I was Lt. Vanciel as everyone stopped to hear what was going on. His message was

"You know your brother was killed, don't you?".....

His words hit me like a bullet. As Mom's December letter flashed through my mind, and my several attempts to answer it, my next thought was.....could he be talking about BRIAN?

I'm sure everyone in the tent was holding their breath, as I was, when I finally asked,

"Which brother do you mean?" He looked at the Red Cross telegram he was holding and said

"Oh - it says Lt. Melvin Lloyd Vanciel."

After my choking "Yes" he said

"I was sure you knew about it but was told to deliver this anyway", and away he went.

One of the Pilots broke the dark cloud that had settled over us by saying

"What a way to find out your brother was killed. How could he be sure you knew?" The others quickly agreed. I took the occasion to tell them of some of Lloyd's accomplishments and what little was known of his plane crash. Also of Brian and what little I knew of his Tank Corps. outfit someplace in Germany.

The early reports of plans to "move up" from Morotai to another island closer to Japan were questioned from time to time. It was becoming more and more apparent that this was not to be as soon as first thought. The rumored base was to be Okinawa. The name meant

nothing to us. In fact I'm not sure any of our group had any idea of where it was, except "closer to Japan". It was finally explained to us that our position on Morotai was primarily to keep an eye on any enemy military activity that might try to move between the Philippine Islands and New Guinea or even to Australia. This rather put us in the rear guard position. Our first objectives were to respond to any Naval or shipping movements through our sector. With no report of enemy ships or island activity in our close vicinity, we were called upon to aid in, or prepare for the liberation of the Philippines, and control of Borneo.

On Feb 7 our flights to the Manila area were interrupted by a report of a supply convoy sighted off the East coast of Borneo. Our mission was to locate and destroy the ship convoy. It was reported that a large group of Zero fighter planes would be escorting the ships, maybe 50 or more. It was also expected that there would be heavy anti-aircraft guns on the guarding ships. We felt only slight relief when it was announced that there would be fighter cover for us; more than 200 P-38s and F4-U Corsairs. With odds like that, who should worry?

We spotted the convoy, with its tell-tail wake shining through the scattered clouds at 12,000 ft. Our plan was to shift from our protective box formation to individual squadrons in trail at a point 15 miles from the target (s) and cross the ships at 45 deg. Again the 424th was last over the target.

My experience up to now was from ground fired anti-aircraft guns. This was to educate us to ship-board guns. It might be expected that guns bobbing and swaying on a floating platform might not be real accurate at 12,000 ft. Watching from our rear position

we could see that those Imperial Navy gunners knew their guns and their sights. Over ground targets the gun emplacements were scattered. These ship-board guns were ALL in a bunch. I believe the best position to be flying was our tail spot. By the time we dropped our bombs, the first bomb hits had so messed them up that they weren't hitting anything. By now they were more concerned with jumping overboard. Many of our planes had been hit by exploding shell fragments, but none were disabled.

It was after the bomb run, and when we had turned to join the box formation again that Zeros began to appear. The intercom became busy as my gunners began calling out "six o'clock high"... "Two o'clock low"... "One o'clock high"... We were in close formation and my flight position was outside plane on the right corner of the 24 plane formation. My gunners tested their guns and waited for the Zeros to get within range. It was reported that the Zeros were using 30 cal. guns against our 50 cal. We were later to learn this was not always true.

Up until now we had not seen any of our fighter escort. Then came the report over the intercom, "Here come our boys". They had been above us and "in the sun". We didn't get a shot at any Zeros that day. There was some talk of watching dogfights, but I couldn't confirm any actual downed planes. There were some minor casualties reported on other crews, as well as many holes in some planes made by the exploding anti-aircraft shells that had to be patched.

My mosquito covered cot felt good after that "Strike".

O U R E N E M Y

It was about this time that our night was interrupted by a straggling formation of Jap "Betty" bombers. All lights went out quickly as the Air Raid sirens wailed all around us at about 01:00 and everyone took cover in the scattered log covered shallow pits or (in our case) under the tent floor. There was enough moonlight shining through the scattered clouds that we could see their planes as they approached our island.

There was no mistaking their enemy identity, because Jap pilot training had never included how to synchronize the engine (propeller) speed on two or more engines. The name "Washing-machine Charley" described the sound. In fact I think they intended to drive us crazy with their off-beat, off-tune sound that echoed over the jungle scattering the monkeys and birds. (And people).

It wasn't more than a couple of minutes until we could hear our fighter planes taking off from the runway, and we watched as they climbed through the clouds. We could see the six Bettys start their noisy approach to the runway clearing and release their bombs. The instant the bombs were released, no less than six spot lights from all around the island converged on their formation, with more added before they had a chance to change direction or altitude. The planes could not possibly escape the crossed spotlights.

In the distance we could hear the explosions of the bombs and see smoke rising from the area about 5 or 6 miles away from us. It was only after the formation had turned away from the island that the anti-aircraft guns began firing. From our position we could see that two or three of the Bettys were in trouble and dropped out

of formation but could not escape the spotlights. When the spotlights were turned off the fighter planes that had been watching all this from above took over.

At breakfast we learned of the damage done. The bombs had missed our planes and service area and the main runways. There were a couple of small bomb craters in our taxi ways that were quickly repaired. It was evident that IF they were trying to hit our runways... they missed. Instead they had hit the Australian plane parking area (that had sent their planes into the air before the attack) and hit some of their fuel or oil storage drums out in the jungle.

The most serious damage was to the hospital area where some patients were unable to escape the flying dirt and concussion. Close by was the prisoner compound which was also damaged. Some of the tents were blown up and others burned by the bomb blasts.

Questions were asked about letting the formation drop their bombs before being fired on, when they had been spotted before getting over the island. The answer was quick in coming. We could not be sure that these pilots were not "kamikaze" minded as many were proving to be. Their plan could be to use the loaded plane as a controlled bomb to be flown directly into a gun emplacement that could be found only if we were firing at them, or into whatever target they might find. The law of averages would tell us that more bombs would miss the target than would hit it from their altitude.... in the dark. Once they left our area they had to contend with the closer problem of our fighter planes, the Australian piloted Spitfires.

This bombing by the Japs continued for several nights but it

became more of a harassment than destructive mission. One of their tactics was to throw out empty bottles (wine, Coke, beer or whatever) before dropping their bombs. The noise (whistles) from these flopping, twisting, tumbling empty containers falling through the air over your head can sound many times louder and worse than bombs falling.

Whenever the sirens sounded we would locate their planes and watch from vantage points through the trees as they flew past our tent city. It was decided to turn on the spotlights as soon as the formation was in range of the lights. If there was any attempt to dive on a light, it was turned off and another from a different spot would come on. This seemed to confuse them in their planned bomb run and the damage done by their bombs was not serious, or permanent.

By now the anti-aircraft gunners were getting tired of tracking but not firing, so they were given permission to fire as soon as they had the range, as long as the planes were still over the water and not over the island. This was coordinated with the Aussies so they could dive in to blast any bomber that decided to break for a suicide run on our installation. I am sure the Aussies would not have hesitated to fly into the ground fire even before it had stopped, to eliminate a Jap plane.

I was never told how many of the Bettys were shot down or if their base had been finally destroyed, but the formations cut down to four and then to three planes. "Washing machine Charley" raids were stopped.

We did have some excitement of another nature. The facilities had been built up on Morotai after its recovery by a landing of

troups on Sept 15, 1944, only 6 months earlier. The whole Island of Morotai had not been cleared of Japs. Many had moved back into the jungle and chose to remain out of sight and live "off the land" with the hope that maybe their Imperial Leader would send them reenforcements to recover this land for their Emperor. After 6 months of living on jungle plants, rats, snakes, and maybe monkey meat they started planning scouting raids into our encampment. It wasn't too hard to wait for a chance and sneak across the guarded perimeter. Many had been caught trying to raid the hospital kitchen supply, which was closest to the boarder, and were locked into the guarded prisoner compound when caught. At least they were given food and a blanket there.

It may have been that someway a message had been sent to these "hold outs", either radio or a submarine note delivered by a native fisherman, that these nightly bombing raids were planned and when. While these bombings were attracting everyones attention, several of the Jap guarillas crossed over the line and made their way into our plane parking area.

Even though there were armed guards at each plane, these Japs found a way to crawl into a plane un-noticed and quietly cut hydraulic lines, electric cables, oxygen lines, and disable radios and guns or even smash instruments. They would then sneak out and crawl to another plane or into the trees to find a hiding place till the next night, for there wasn't time to get all the way back across the perimeter. Some of the planes had already been checked out and loaded for the next days mission.

The first crew members arriving at the planes sounded an alarm as the usual inspections were begun. Each plane was given a thorough

inspection to find any damage done.

An intensive search was conducted of the area to try and locate the saboteur(s). One was found after daylight, hiding in a tall tree. Another was located hiding in a drainage ditch, with the help of a stray dog that had responded to our food and care and became a "mascot". They each were wearing only tattered GI pants and army shoes, but had a sheath knife strapped to their leg. If they had a gun it had been discarded (or hidden) before they were found. All attempts to get information about the others from these two proved futile. It was guessed that there had to be more of them still in the area, so guards were doubled around all planes and our service facilities for several weeks, but we heard of no more sabotage.

One day some native Islanders came into our camp area indicating they wanted to trade (sell) some handcraft items to us. Several servicemen had been attracted to the area to watch what appeared to be a native family paddle their dugout outrigger up on the beach. There was much interest in the large hollowed out log that served as the hull and the two poles lashed across it holding the smaller log about six feet to the side. The total length was estimated to be twelve feet and the hull (log) almost 24 in. wide at the widest part. If the waves got too high, part of the load was transferred to the outrigger by a passenger riding out there. There were many of these in use for fishing and transportation throughout the scattered islands, but they had learned it wise to display an American flag when in Allied held territory. I assume they also had a Jap flag to display if it became necessary.

As word spread of their presence and their wares, it wasn't too

long before they had traded all their stock and were starting to negotiate for a return trip. Running down the beach came the M.P. squad; ordered them off the beach and made it plain to them that they were not welcome in this Restricted Military area. It was then that we were given a quick review of previous incidents of Japs useing these natives for spying and even infiltration. Whatever it was that the M.P.s had said to the "natives", they had jumped aboard and paddled furiously out of sight before our lecture was finished.

Even with the nightly harassment raids over our camp, and the threat of Jap spys infiltrating the area, we were treated with entertainment at the open air theater by movies and even live shows by traveling groups or local "talent". Whenever the Navy was using the Bay for supply transfer or fueling or whatever, sailors would take the opportunity to come ashore and watch our films, that they had not seen, and often invite us to go onboard to watch their films that were new to us. As I remember, some of those Hollywood productions were real sorry attempts to encourage "The Fighting Men" but after the third (or tenth) viewing the "make believe" was more apt to affect nausea. It was no wonder that sailors confined to their ships for months at a time would welcome a chance to sit on our flattened log benches and see another version of what usually turned out to be the same old Movie Plot.

On Feb 13th everyone who could come was invited to a special program at our "LR" theater commemorating the second year of the 307th Bomb Group combat activity in the Southwest Pacific. This gave us "newcomers" a very brief history of the record that would not (or could not) be published in the daily news papers.

Script written by Harvey and Hamilton and read by

Warren and McConnell with a Song sung by:

Dennis, Souter, Halland Ryan....

was typed at the bottom of the mimeographed Souvenir Program quoted below.

Two years ago today -- six B-24's raided Shortland Harbor.

Fifty percent of our planes did not return to Henderson Field from this, the first mission in the South Pacific Area.

A month and a half before, on December 23rd, we had raided Wake Island from Midway. The longest mission a formation of bombers had ever flown to that time.

Every plane returned. A medal mission.

Our first missions flown with the Thirteenth Air Force were rough.

Two days later we lost two more ships.

One crew hit the silk. One crew made a water landing.

We had received our rebuke. Tactics were changed.

We flew at night. Night after Night.

The Japs flew at night, too. Night after night.

"Washing Machine Charlie", we called the Jap raiders. We don't know what the Japs up the slot called us -- but we bombed hell out of them.

For six months, we kept up these harassing raids.

We hit 'em during the day, too.

Munda, Kahili, Buka, Ballale, and Shortland Harbor. Soon we were specializing in daylight missions.

The Japs outnumbered us at first.

Our gunners shot them down. Hundreds of them.

Soon there were few left. And few fields still serviceable.

We got orders to knock out Rabaul. Day after day we hit airdromes on the Bismark Archipelago. Pulverized the town of Rabaul -- its business section -- and Red Light District. Ack Ack batteries were wicked. Barrages holed plane after plane.

Then came Truk. The unknown, unhit Japanese Pearl Harbor. The first attempt at Truk. We dropped our eggs on some Island. S-2 couldn't find that Island. It wasn't on the map.

The next raid we found Truk. Every bomb hit the target.

We destroyed 49 planes on the ground. 31 were shot down in the hottest air battle of its kind in the Pacific. Truk was hit, day after day. Truk, the mightiest fortress of the Pacific, was reduced to a "Wewak."

We didn't finish off Truk. Turned it over to the Seventh Air Force.

Bombers of the Seventh are still hitting Truk. What had become another "Milk-Run" to us -- was "rugged", a primary, for the Seventh.

Then came Yap.

Palau, too.

With the "Bomber Barons," The Long Rangers made the Thirteenth Air Force the Longest Range Air Force in the World. 2400 miles round trip.

16-hour overwater missions, with 1 tiny elusive landmark, Sorol Island.

From the Navy came this message -- To General Streett from Admiral Carney, Chief of Staff, Third Fleet --

Quote -

Damned Thirteenth Air Force has just about spoiled the war for our carriers, particularly at Yap.

And he adds --

Admiral Davison's Task Group has left Yap in disgust after the first day because our old Thirteenth Air Force had left no decent targets.

Unquote.

While knocking out Yap and Palau, we neutralized Biak and Noemfoor, spearheads for the beach-heads there. Then we moved to the treeless island of Wakde. From this "Devils Island" we knocked out everything in range.

The Fifth Air Force got the credit.

"Jolly Rogers"! !

"Best damn outfit in the world."

Moved to Noemfoor, we got rough targets.

The roughest in the Southwest Pacific Area.

Balikpapan! ! Borneo, was the "Ploesti" of the Pacific.

Fires were started.

20 - 30 thousand feet soared the black oil smoke.

We went after that Jap Task Force in the Sulu Sea. And hit it.

The Navy claimed we did more damage than we took credit for.

We saved the day for our new landing on the Philippines. For the first time, B-24s turned back a task force, unaided.

We hit the Philippines. Are still hitting them. We were the first over Corregidor. And blew hell out of it.

Today is our 460th Mission in the South and Southwest Pacific. After two years flying for the Thirteenth Air Force we have--

-- As General Arnold stated --

"Been whipping the Japs anytime and anyplace. Slugging them under any conditions. Shows the courage of the Thirteenth Air Force to wade into the enemy."

We have flown 460 missions, 6,200 sorties.

We have hit over one hundred different targets.

Hit 'em everywhere.

From Munda -- Kahili -- Shortland Harbor -- to the Philippines.

We started at Wake. We've circled the Pacific. Tarawa -- Nauru-- Ellice Islands -- Bougainville.

Rabaul -- Truk -- Yap -- Palau.

Biak -- Noemfoor -- Woleai -- Halmaheras -- Celebes.

Borneo and the Philippines.

And now Luzon. We've shot down 482 enemy aircraft -- 34 sures, and 86 probables, and damaged 51 more.

On the ground we have destroyed 169 Jap planes.

We have gone after everything from a barge to a task force.

Sunk 17,275 tons, damaged 106,615 tons of shipping.

In two years we have dropped 13,300 tons of bombs over targets.

Eight campaigns and the Philippine Liberation.

The 307th and the 5th Groups are the longest flying, hardest hitting bomb outfit in the world.

Rough as a cob, that's us --

Most travelled "Heavies" in the theater. Glory for the Seventh Air Force.

Communiques for MacArthur.

We've given the Japs Hell -- and made Tokyo Rose's radio program.

We call the Thirteenth, the Jungle Air Force -- ourselves the bastard outfit.

End of quote.

On the program was also printed seven descriptive verses that were enthusiasticly sung by all to the tune of "Back Home Again In Indiana" that ended;

"And we'll say goodbye to Yamamotos Task Force -- For a decent home-cooked meal."

After our 10th combat mission, there was an automatic step up in rank along with ribbons and citations awarded, including the Air Medal.

1 5

R E A R G U A R D A C T I O N

Feb 17th and 19th were two missions to the west coast of Borneo to Miri Air Drome. Borneo was considered a necessary base for the defence of the Japanese Empire, but also was a most important source of strategic war supplies for Japan including oil. By this time it could not be considered a defence base, but rather a "defended" base because their Front Line had been moved back to Formosa and Okinawa. It was, however still a source of oil; if only they could get it to their fighting forces from behind our advancing troupes. There were other products that the Japanese needed from these rich Southern Islands, and they intended to transport them to the homeland or at least to their Imperial Fighting Forces as long as possible.

These coastal air fields were still held by the Japs but they were not being used by Jap cargo planes to airlift freight to the homeland. In fact I doubt the Japs had built planes to be used for this purpose. Rather they were used as bases for fighter planes (which they were building at a fantastic rate) to protect ships (or boats or barges) trying to move cargo north. Our missions were to destroy or render these runways unserviceable for the planes to take off or land. In the process of bombing the runways it was not always by accident that planes still on the ground, or supply inventories would be destroyed.

We were also learning that Jap disabled planes were "planted" where they could be easily seen to decoy us away from their operational fleet hidden in the trees or under netting. Most often we could expect every flyable plane to be in the air by the time we started our bomb run. If they chose to tangle with us, they usually

came out losers. We could expect the Navy and Marines with their F-4-U Corsairs or our new P-51s or P-38s to keep them off our backs. Jap plane and pilot replacements were getting scarce.

Our information source reported that even as we were leaving the bomb cratered runway, and almost before the dust settled, the Jap construction crews were filling in the holes using bulldozers and native (forced?) labor, so that the waiting planes could land again before running out of gas. Now you can understand that after flying six hours, with our load of bombs, to "disable" a runway....we didn't appreciate them re-leveling it in a couple of hours after we left.

Our next mission to that same target gave them more than a little surprise. Each of our bombs was set with a delay trigger of from 15 min. to as much as 9 hours. Our "source" reported....

"Construction equipment destroyed while leveling bomb craters.

"No more runway....

"No more bulldozers...

"Not much sleep...

"Some Zeros blown up while landing....

"Many Zeros crashed or covered over with 2 to 4 ft of dirt thrown over them from the buried bomb explosions."

On Feb 21st our target changed to Sandakan on the north coast. With a load of (9) 500lb demolition bombs and 2,900 gal of gas, I was given the green light for take-off at 06:27 in plane #236 which was becoming almost a regular for me. After clearing the runway and starting the climb to cruise altitude, through the earphones came a rather feeble radio call to our leader WDBA. Radio use was reserved for emergency use only, so the leader curtly responded. The weak

call came back;

"Request permission to return to base." There was a moment of silence, then the leader asked

"Why?" The answer

"Nose compartment too cold and drafty... wind leaking around window." -- I'm sure everyone was wondering if this new crew had forgotten to bring their heated flying suits. Then the response;

"Can't you plug the leaks?" Then after a long pause came the stuttering

"N-N-No".... and from the leader...

"Permission granted. Drop bombs in clear ocean... Report to Operations."

The group of 18 planes minus 1 formed at 10:35 and headed for the target runway at 9,000 ft. I briefly thought of the missing crew being too cold at 500 ft; it was about 20 deg colder up here. Our 424th Sqd. were tail-end formation again and this gave the cameraman some good shots of the bomb pattern as well as a view of the area for S-2 evaluation. A curtain of anti-aircraft shells were all around us but once again, no direct hits. In close formation we turned north over the water and headed for home again.

It didn't take long for the information to get around that explained why the "draft" could not be "plugged" in the aborted plane. The pilot had allowed (he said) his co-pilot to take the plane off the runway. For some reason he had drifted to one side into the trees that had not been cleared or topped along the runway pattern. The bombardier's (nose) windows were smashed by the trees scattering plexiglass even onto the pilots floor, and rather making a mess of the bombsight and the navigator's desk. There was

no doubt about it--there was a cold draft through the plane at 160 mph that they could not "plug up."

Feb 25th at 10:50 I was over Tawau Air Drome on the North East coast of Borneo (in #236) with (8) 1,000 lb bombs. Paved runways need bigger bombs to break them up. There was no doubt that these bases were still active, for we could see planes taking off as we approached the target. Once again our staggered altitudes aided us in getting through the ground fire with little damage.

Flying into and through this exploding fireworks with armed bombs still hanging on the racks and a 450 gal rubber "spare" gas tank strapped into the bomb bay, does keep you tense and sensitive to every sound and sight and plane movement. Once the bomb run is started the bombardier has control of the plane with his bomb-sight. If he moves the cross hairs to the right or left as the target passes under the pre-set sight, the plane moves right or left to line up. This leaves me setting in the pilot seat with hands off the controls until the bombs are released. For that period of time it is almost like being a passenger watching all the action from the front seat. On rare occasions I can override the bombsight. For instance if another plane gets too close, or for some reason a bomb drops from a plane above into your flight path. It never happened to me, but you have to be ready for anything.

As soon as the bombs are released, my concentration is on close formation as the leader turns away from the area and sets a course for home. By this time Jap fighter planes with "hot" pilots are diving on us from out of the sun. At this time of day there are generally lots of large white cloud formations to head for, but this can be rather a questionable tactic to try and keep 18 planes in

close formation when you can't see farther than the wing tip light. It's best to just keep together and let the fighters come. The gunners show us what they were trained to do. As we get farther from the Jap base, they have to give it up and head back; those that are still flying.

With them out of our hair, we can then concentrate on our gliding cruise back to base. This time we each have an area assigned to search for a reported downed 1 man life raft with instructions to radio "Playmate 41 on V.H.F. 'D' channel" if sighted. "Remain with raft as long as gas permits." "Playmate" was our Navy Air Sea Rescue outfit that picked up hundreds of downed flyers from many times active battle areas and brought them back to ships or wherever.

Layte and Manila were now considered "liberated" by Allied Forces but uncounted Japs that had no intention of surrendering, were forced back into the jungle and hill areas of the Philippine Islands. Mar 4th and 8th, I was one of 24 planes to pound a Jap HDQTRS and AA Position on the western point of Mindanao at Zamboanga.

While marching down the streets of Cedar Rapids in training we often sang "Oh-the monkey wrapped his tail around the flag pole", along with many other catchy songs. We were now to sing the same tune with the words "Oh-the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga". We learned first hand that this is exactly true of these jungle monkeys. We also learned, the hard way, that they do not make friendly pets.

As was expected, the anti-aircraft positions we were to destroy, were active to the last, and even at 12,000 ft we felt the effects.

Again I was flying tail plane in the last group with the cameraman. Along with our bombs we tossed out bundles of printed news information sheets that could have been the first real "news" of Allied movements (and Jap losses) that many islanders had seen. If the only information they were getting on the islands was from "Tokeo Rose" radio broadcasts, it definitely wasn't to be taken at face value.

It was not unusual to listen to her broadcasts while flying home from a mission and hear her announce where we had just bombed, and how many planes there were, where our base was and of course how many of us had been "Shot Down" by the superior Japanese fighter planes or AA guns. Her numbers came from a translation that we knew was in error. There was sometimes a reference to American pilots, by nickname, almost as though she knew them personally and was giving "kindly" advice to them.

Her broadcasts often contained accurate? facts which were so twisted and buried in the presentation that it was almost like a comedy to us. For instance; The Tokeo Rose report of the Jap bombing of Morotai when they hit the prisoner compound was reported as a "liberation of harmless, unarmed natives being held under guard in an unmarked Allied torture camp."

Another 18 of us were over an airdrome on the east coast of Borneo on Mar 18th marking my seventeenth combat mission. Then on Mar 21st we were again called to the Philippine area in full 24 plane formation to Cebu city. Our mission; to prepare the area for Allied Occupation by destroying specific sections of the city from 7,500 ft (our assigned alt). My formation position was moved up to leader's left wingman. Our take-off time was 06:32 with 2,700 gal

of gas. Our time over the target was 10:30. I was flying plane #462, that I had flown on only 1 mission before. On the way back home we were to search for a Navy C-47 with 20 men aboard that had left Morotai at 15:00 on Mar 19 and was going to Samar. In searching for the lost C-47 we had to fly below some heavy clouds which brought us down to about 2,000 ft for most of the way home.

My engineer (Cpl. Blessin) was keeping me posted on the fuel supply, and the gauges were telling us that we were going to use all of it. It was still daylight when the air strip came into view. Only one slow turn was needed to line up with the runway and the throttles were still set for lean cruise as I pulled the nose up for the landing. When the wheels touched the runway, all four engines QUIT... out of fuel.

Bill was on the radio asking for the tractor to come tow us to the parking spot. I let the plane roll as far as it would, down the runway and over to the edge where we sat waiting for the tractor. I have no record of anyone locating the lost plane. Once more my faithful crew (and I) was convinced that God was watching out for us, and we didn't keep it a secret. The gas gauges were DRY... but so were our feet.

On March 24th I was again one of 24 planes over Cebu with target #12 assigned. Our 424th Squadron lead the group this time and my plane (#290) was one of only a few that were equipped with an early form of radar. This added some weight to the plane as well as some extra drag, (antenna) which took more gas. For this reason they were not favored by some pilots, but they did serve to give advanced warning of enemy planes to the group, even through the clouds. Our experience with enemy planes was not that much of a problem by this

time, but this radar was also useful in locating ships that were sometimes hard to find.

On the way home we were treated to a sight that I'll not forget. Scattered clouds both above and below us, with the sun shining through formed rainbows ---- without end. Full circle rainbows!

GETTING OLDER

On March 26th it was my turn to transport 6 crewmen to Mokmer Air Field, Biak, to pick up a new plane for the Group. This gave Bill, Bert, Blessin, Yuhasz and me a break in the combat action for a couple of days. It also gave the rest of my crew a chance to pick up an extra mission by going out with another pilot. It seemed there was always a call for "willing" and able gunners and bombardiers to fill vacancies on "short" crews. This 3 to 4 hr trip to Biak through scattered showers and clouds towering to 12,000 ft allowed up to 10 mi visibility in the clear spaces. I kept the navigator busy keeping track of my fun path flying between the darker clouds at 8,000 ft with no particular worry about running out of gas with a 10 hr supply in the tanks.

Before landing at Biak I made a few circles of the island as a sight-seer and was surprised to see hundreds of planes parked out in jungle clearings, wing tip to wing tip. There were bombers, cargo planes, and all types of fighter planes. These were all war weary, discarded planes, that were to be stripped of essential or scarce units or parts. Closer to the field were rows of new planes that were waiting for delivery to the fighting units if they could unravel the red tape necessary to release them. If a plane was "lost" in combat, it "could" be replaced with a new one. If a plane came back from a specified number of missions (or hours) intact, it could be retired and exchanged for a new one. If a plane was damaged beyond "reasonable" repair (with parts from other planes or available new parts) it was likely cannibalized of useable parts where it landed, and a new plane could be requisitioned.

On the return trip next day, Mar 27th I had a chance to review some of the many experiences I had been through as I completed my short 22 years of life. When I graduated from High School and started working as a Gold dredge hand, there was no thought of U.S.A.A.F. Military training; Commissioned Pilot 1st Lt; Flying Combat on 19 missions; full days flying over water heading for the only island with a runway big enough to land on; and now crossing the Equator for the eighth time. Returning to my mahogany floored tent and my army cot, I couldn't help feeling grateful to even be alive and suffering no pain. I wasn't even worried about what was going to happen to me as I started my 23rd year.

At our Officers Club there was always liquor available at the bar by the drink and sometimes, if the supply didn't run too low, even by the bottle, for cash. I mentioned earlier that after each mission the crew members were given a chit for 2 oz of liquor (of their choice). It was my practice, as it was with some others, to save these chits and use them as "Trade" units. Many would keep a bottle to use as a "bank" and would collect their 2 ozs to keep as a reserve, for maybe a special party or occasion. Between the four of us in our tent, we arranged on several occasions to trade a "common" bottle (maybe not quite full strength) for two (or three) cases of canned fruit or whatever from the Navy boys next door. We asked no questions where they got them from, or how. Sometimes the labels were not too legible on all the cans, or even on the unopened case; if the contents of one can proved true, we took a chance on the rest.

Our tent was designed with an added feature "built in". Under or near each cot there was one or two floor boards that were not

nailed. With a space dug out below, there was room for a one man bomb shelter. It was almost like having a cyclone celler under your bed. By this time we were begining to feel rather safe from "Washing Machine Charley". One of the "Hide-y-holes" was converted to a pantry with a stock of canned peaches, pears, manderin oranges, fruit cocktail, pineapple, fruit juices and even some ice cream mix. When packages from home arrived with cookies, (broken) cake, (crumbs) or candy, (melted) we could open some fruit and enjoy a party.

We learned a lesson with the ice cream mix. From the "snack shack" we bought about 25 lbs of ice. (Cost; more than 8 gal of ice cream should have--which wasn't available at any price.) We found a freezer and cranked till the ice was almost all melted. With no directions to follow, we had added condensed milk to the "Mix" hoping to make smooth ice cream. It would not freeze. One bystander suggested we should have used water with the mix. As the last of the ice was melting, we removed the top for another look at our liquid "Mix". Our friend opened his canteen and started pouring water into our mix. Not more than a tablespoon full of water almost instantly turned the whole container to ICE CREAM ! The condensed milk flavor didn't stop us from enjoying every last spoonfull---with peaches topping each serving.

Mission number 20 was on Mar 31st to Oelin Air Drome on the south coast of Borneo. Crossing the equator (ninth and 10th time) the 15 + hr mission to the oil rich area of Borneo stirred up Zeros and another hornet's nest of ground defences. My position was leader's left wingman. The bomb run of 157 mph, at 9,000 ft, increased our accuracy but as soon as the bombs were dropped, the

right turn breakaway increased our air speed to 165 mph with 30" Man. Press. and 2,000 rpm. Within ten minutes we were allowed to spread out and set up our cruise for home.

We were never told of the invasion plans of Borneo or the attempt to use it for an advance to Singapore. Our briefings were always specific with targets pictured or described along with "known" hazards and the reminder that enemy defences were subject to change overnight. Malaysia was being considered as a necessary site for Allied movement into Vietnam and Japan from China. Ours was not to formulate strategy. There were dozens of career officers with countless dedicated support aides that were striving to make world history with clever plans---and some did indeed make history: some in spite of (or because of) their constant infighting. Washington's control was often in question; as was British, Netherlands, China, Army, Navy and Marine cooperation. Our day by day assignments were accepted as necessary for stopping the Imperial Japanese War Plan of dominating the Southwestern Pacific.

It was not made public that the one thing most all of the strategists agreed on was the "probability" that the war with Japan would last until 1947... or longer. Overall plans were laid with this as a "target" date.

Our target for Apr 6 was the personnel area on Jolo, a small island between Zamboanga and Northern Borneo; a "stepping stone." Eighteen planes in trailing squadron formation, dropping (8) 1,000 lb bombs each on a small island cleared a lot of trees---and most everything else.

D R E A M P R O J E C T

Mail call was always an exciting time at our headquarters tent. For several years I had been collecting "Popular Mechanics" and "Popular Science" magazines and enjoyed reading them. Mom found out she could mail them to me, if the magazines were sent in two sections. (Weight restrictions.) Sometimes the second half would arrive before the first, but it didn't matter. Those sections were carefully read by many friends and filed, and I even brought them home with me later.

Along with many others there was one pilot that especially enjoyed reading them. His name was Rene' Wetzel. His legal name included about 4 or 5 relatives names in between that could elicit laughter if he chose to recite them all in an introduction. A graduate engineer, he was working as draftsman in the design section of the ~~Boeing~~^{Douglas} Aircraft Plant in Southern Calif. He had designed some sections that were incorporated into the new A-26 attack bomber. He had watched the prototype plane go through the test flights and be accepted by the Air Force for production.

When the Draft Board started putting pressure on him, he went to the USAAF recruiting office and signed up for Cadet Training (as I had) but with what he thought was a guarantee (?) that he would get to fly "His A-26 plane".

This was not to be. He fell into the "basket" like most hopeful Cadets, and came up flying the "unloved" B-24. He also had not been fortunate in his selection of crew members and it seemed he was always hunting for someone to fly with him, drawing names from the pool of unhappy, uncooperative or otherwise "sick and sorry"

crewmembers.

I have never known anyone who could draw machinery, parts, airplanes, boats or cars in accurate scale from any perspective as quickly as he could. He would pass the time by freehand drawing each individual part that made up a gun (or whatever) in relation to its mating part---clearer than a lot of parts books illustrate. Wetzel could not get away from a drawing board. Among the many plane drawings he had created, was a modified B-24 with fixed guns mounted to be fired by the pilot, as he had designed into the A-26. He had resigned himself to not ever getting to fly his A-26, so was dreaming of making the B-24 "act like his baby." I became more and more interested in his idea to convert a B-24 into a strafing plane.

After studying his plans and listening to his arguments, I agreed to help him make up the necessary parts to adapt available 50cal. machine guns into a compact package that could be mounted under the bomb bay catwalk. He had convinced me that 5 guns could be placed in the package, staggered fore and aft to allow the ammunition belts to feed each gun from a supply hung on the bomb racks. In addition to the 5 gun package were 2 more 50 cal guns on each side mounted below the pilot and co-pilot windows. His structural analysis suggested that with the addition of only a slight reenforcement to the side walls, there would be sufficient strength to support a 20mm cannon on each side also. This would give the pilot control of (9) 50 cal machine guns and (2) 20mm cannons aimed by the plane and fired by the pilot! With spaced tracer bullets in the ammunition belts, there would be no problem spotting and correcting for moving targets out in front---and not below and behind. At this time we

had no way of knowing that many others were planning such systems that would even utilize rockets this way.

Wetzel had shown his plans and explained his ideas to first one and then another Headquarter Officer and in many cases was referred to another Department. They were all very receptive and when our operations officer was convinced that we were serious about putting our plans into reality, he authorized a trip to Finschaffen on Apr 12th to use the maintenance machine shop facility located there to cut and form the sheet aluminum brackets.

This was my first time to see a complete machine shop mounted in a huge covered trailer for "Field" use. Side panels were raised as awnings and mounted inside were lathes, shaper, drill press, grinders, saws, sheers and box brakes along with work benches and every hand tool you could ask for. Setting off to the side was the electric generator and behind was a large "Do-All" band saw with a rack of saw blades, that could cut up to 4' aluminum sheets easily. It took me less than three hours to lay out, cut out and form the boxfull of small brackets needed. Step one was completed. Then the flight back to Morotai and our tents for the night. I believe Wetzel slept with those raw parts under his cot that night.

A system of "requisitioning" that grew out of "need" (real or imagined) was rather routinely practiced on all "foreign soil." There were of course unwritten rules, and soon "artists" became "experts" as they worked out some real creative methods of obtaining equipment or supplies from questionable "sources."

Jeeps were considered a symbol of rank; much more noticeable than a General's Star or a Captain's Bars. As Operations Officer, Capt. Looker was entitled to, and was issued a Jeep for his use. He

did not, (or chose not to) have a driver. He drove himself. Thus when the Captain was flying, the Jeep was parked on the flight line (or supposed to be) until he returned. The Engineering Officer also was issued a Jeep and used it as necessary in his work. Often he would send one of his ground crew members for mail or parts or even to a plane parked half a mile away, but he was waiting for it to return for his trip back to the tent area. Our Captain was of a nature to share and let his Jeep be used whenever he wasn't needing it.

As more outfits began using the air strip, our AAF Jeeps became a "source" for "requisitioners." To put it plainly, stolen from their parking places. "Requisition Rules" went something like this..... My Jeep is not in its' parking area.... I need one.... "requisition" the next one you find.

I was told that at one point, all Jeeps were recalled to the Motor Pool for reassignment, because NOT ONE was being used by the registered driver! In fact some had been repainted (Navy) (Army) (Marine) and some not even found. It was reported that on at least one occasion, some sailors lost one in the Bay trying to hoist it aboard their ship when the life boat rigging snapped. When the Jeeps were reissued, all sorts of security ideas were implemented; hidden switches, fuel shut-off valves, padlocks on the gear shift levers, crossing spark plug wires...or removing them or the distributor rotor. These measures would work for a little while but in spite of them the Jeeps would disappear. Once a scouting party found the Captain's stolen Jeep and was stopped by the MPs while trying to return it. A trace check discovered the same outfit had stolen the same Jeep 3 times before. Maybe they thought there was a

rule... After 3 times it's mine!

If I was to help Wetzel put together his dream package, we needed transportation between the flight line and our tent area. It was not practical to arrange with the motor pool for a vehicle and driver at a moments notice. I made a tour of the motor pool salvage area, and found an abandoned 4X4 truck with no windshield, no doors, no back glass or seat cushion. Permission was given to use it.... if we could get it running. With piles of army vehicles scattered around half burried in the mud, most parts were no problem. It took longer to wash the mud off than it did to get it running. I think ours was the only 4X4 truck running on the island. There were 6X6 and Jeeps by the hundreds, but no one was tempted to "Requisition" our salvaged fresh air taxi.

On one trip back from the flight line, I ran into the usual tropical rain storm about 14:00. We seldom wore a shirt or undershirt and could usually wait under a tent or palm tree until the sun came out. I was scheduled for a briefing at 16:00 so figured it best to not wait for the rain to stop. Behind the seat was a dirty poncho that I stuck my head through and wrapped around me like a tent. The cab should keep the downpour off my head. It didn't. Water came through the open front of that cab like a river and ran our the door openings like white water rapids. The poncho might have helped, but with both hands on the steering wheel (which was a must) I was up to my elbows in running water. The rain stopped before I got to the tent area and when I climbed out of the wet seat my plan was to "requisition" a windshield as soon as possible.

A P R I L M I S S I O N S

Apr 15th was my turn to fly a scouting mission with one other plane along the eastern coast of Borneo. It was reported that there was some shipping activity and we were to locate and destroy whatever we found within a certain sector. We took off at 11:00 with a full load (3,100 gal) of gas and (9) 500 lb bombs. Our instructions were to bomb from 10,000 ft. When we approached the search area, we agreed to divide it up and I would take the southern half.

After about two hours of searching, the only activity we saw was what appeared to be a fishing boat. It was out of sight of land but seemed to be moving up the Straight on a steady course. Bob suggested we go down and see if they were really fishing. I dropped down to about 2,000 ft and as I flew across their stern, the Jap flag and the single large sail was pulled down.

While we watched, the "sail" boat became a power boat. It set up a wake that could be seen for miles as it streaked for Borneo. My cameraman and the observers in the waist got a good look at the "boat" and reported that there were no fishing lines or gear and the boat seemed to be riding low in the water as if loaded with something.

Bob asked if he could take the plane over it for a target. As we came up behind it, Bob let 2 bombs go. That skipper was waiting for them to drop. As soon as they left our plane, the boat turned hard left and was several hundred yards away from the point of impact. In frustration, Bob asked if I could get lower. I reminded him of the short fuse setting. How low could we be and still get

away from our own bomb blast?

He asked for a 1,000 ft alt. and we tried it again at 160 mph. We came closer, but the same tactic of the skipper dodged the single bomb. As the bomb hit the water, it blew water over them and we could feel the shock wave. This time there were deck guns firing at us.

I couldn't help wishing for Wetzel's gun package. Another pass was made using only the nose turret guns and the lower ball turret. The incendiary bullets set fire to the wooden deck and hull. As we left, there were crewmen jumping overboard and swimming for a lifeboat.

There was still gas enough to fly over to the coast and scout for more boats that could be hidden in the mouth of some rivers. We were still flying at about 800 ft when we found what appeared to be an abandoned dock and rusting tin warehouse a little way up one river. There were several oil drums on the dock and as we flew past, the tail gunner, Cpl. Braun fired a bust at the drums. They were full of gasoline. Instantly there was flames all over the dock. As we flew away toward open water, the warehouse burst into flame and black smoke billowed high into the sky.

If the boat radio hadn't set off the alarm, this tower of smoke certainly did. We were no sooner over the clear water than three Zeros in formation spotted us (or we spotted them) at about 5,000 ft above us. I was up to about 1,000 ft and climbing at full throttle when I told Bob to get rid of the other bombs. The gas from our aux. bomb bay tank had been transferred into the wing tanks which balanced the load and helped increase the rate of climb. The question now was; is it safer to stay on the deck to keep the

fighters from diving on and under us, or climb back up to cruise altitude where we can gain speed by diving if necessary. Recent reports of Kamikazi pilots flying their plane into the target, ruled out the idea of staying low.

Their position above and to the right allowed the top turret and right waist guns to keep them in our sights, even if they were out of range, as long as they were going in the same direction we were. I pushed the throttles into emergency power and set a steady climb rate at 168+ mph. The Zeros were flying closer to 200 mph on the level, so it didn't take long for them to get ahead of us; still above and to the right.

At about the 2 o'clock high position, one peeled off and headed for us with the other two watching. This gave the nose turret as well as the top turret a clear target. Each gunner had checked his guns and was ready as the first Zero made his diving pass at us. As the fighter opened fire on us, I dropped the nose enough to gain about 45 mph and started a flat turn into his path. His bullets were streaming into the place he thought I should have been.

With our four guns trained on him, he decided it was time to break away before eating any more lead. As he passed us, I set up my straight climb again. We were now up to about 2,000 ft in clear sky with the sun behind us.

Then came the second Zero on the same pattern run as the first. He hardly got close enough for us to give him a good burst before he broke away and the third followed.

By this time the third was quite a ways farther ahead of us and was approaching from almost head on. That gave the nose and top

turrets clear shots. They waited until he was well within range and cut loose. When he dropped below us, he was trailing black smoke as he headed for Borneo.

By this time the other two had formed again above and to the right just as before;.... the Jap training book said to do it this way?

As they were passing we noticed each plane had a pair of small bombs under the wing. As they got ahead, one turned back on us, this time dropping the bombs from about 1,000 ft above. They exploded above and in front of me. There was a bright white light and our plane was showered with burning pieces of phosphorus. He hadn't got close enough for us to get a good shot at him before the break-off and climb away.

The second Zero turned and lined up to drop his bombs. His aim was frustrated by my diving speed change and turn to the left. Again the explosion was above but by the time the pieces hit us they had burned out and were only ashes.

A report on the inter-comm told me that the 2 Zeros were heading for Borneo. Cpl. Blessin started his inspection of the plane for damage as each crew member checked in with "no scratches" but mad because they hadn't been able to shoot 3 Zeros out of the sky. We were sure one was turned back smoking, and at least one other had been hit, but had no way to confirm it. This was one of the universal problems "Record Keepers" faced. The "Score card" too often was based on probability rather than proveability.

I cut back to normal power and continued climbing to 6,000 ft for the gliding cruise back to base. Inspection of the plane revealed no internal damage. Bill had been watching the oil and

cylinder head temperatures closely while in emergency power and they never exceeded safe limits.

Again we all agreed that the B-24 was a pretty good plane to be flying in. The ground crew found many places where the hot phosphorus had stuck to the "skin" surface or left marks where pieces had hit and slid off. Some small bullet holes were found near the bomb bay doors that were from the boat deck guns.

Apr 18th we were assigned a target on Mindanao at Cotabato. While landings had been made on these islands, there were still areas where holdouts were resisting take over. The 424th was tail end squadron again of 18 planes over target #8A at 09:20.

Briefing for the APR 22 mission was ended in silence as we slowly walked to our tents for a short nights sleep(?) Another mission to Borneo, but this time to Balikpapan and ships loading oil (fuel) for the Imperial Fleet. We were well aware of the fortifications and defences surrounding this most important oil center, sometimes referred to as the "HOTTEST" target in the South Pacific. When the thought of Naval ships at the same spot sunk in to our thinking, no one wanted to talk about the prospects. We had been very fortunate up to now.

As with most of our formation take-offs, we were given the green light 60 sec after the plane ahead on the air strip and 30 sec after the plane on the parallel runway. It was becoming routine for the Aussie Spitfires to duck in between us from their taxi way and take off in less than half the runway we needed. They had to be alert and not run into our tail because we were slow by their standards.

It was their practice to climb over us and bear off to the side away from the central tower to clear the airspace we needed. In one

way I welcomed their intrusion when they reminded me that we were promised fighter protection over the target. I knew their planes could not be our cover for two reasons. They could not fly that far and return, and their speed would have put them there at least an hour too soon.

We were expecting to encounter up to 50 Jap fighter planes, so it was set up for over 150 Allied fighters to cover us; Marine, Navy, Aussie as well as AAF coming from "wherever" at 11:00.

The trip to the assembly point was through the usual scattered clouds with the sun rising behind us and arching to almost directly overhead before we reached Borneo. Our 424th sqd. was to go in first at 15,000 ft. Lt. Crawford was lead plane with Lts. Helms and Winningham on his wings. I was flying #290 (the radar plane) and positioned leader of the left section with Lt. Christian and Lt. Fletcher on my wings. Before the target was sighted there were fighter planes chasing each other overhead.

This time my crew was forced to concentrate on their own field of fire and would not be allowed to help spot for each other. Everyone was BUSY.

~~Cpl.~~ Braun was seated in his tail turret watching everything behind us. Cpl. Blessin was at one open waist window with a 50 cal. Cpl. Yuhasz was at the other waist window. Cpl. Prockniak was crouched in the fetal position inside the lowered Ball turret watching out for our belly.

Cpl. Kreczko was seated inside his nose gun turret watching everything ahead of us. Cpl. Brener was in his top turret with his head and guns above the plane watching everything above us. F/O Schumacher was monitoring the radios. F/O Seddon was at his bomb

sight and Bill and I were busy at the controls.

As I was setting up the bomb run, the AA guns were zeroing in on our range from at least a dozen ground points. The first black puffs were below us. Before they turned white, the next bunch were above us. The next were exactly on our altitude and only slightly ahead of us. My first instinct was to "CHANGE COURSE!"

Over the Intercomm Bob said

"I've got it" as he switched the Bombsight in.

For the next 140 sec. he was flying the plane and all I could do was wait AND WATCH. The AA shell that should have hit us on center, exploded about 100 yds to the left and showered us with flack. The instant the 6th 1,000 lb bomb dropped clear of the bay, the doors were rolled shut and I took over the controls again.

By this time the flack was like a wall.... behind us.... and the fighters above were waiting to dive on any bomber showing problems. The 165 mph bomb run was boosted to 180 as I followed the leader in a right turn toward the open water. A look back at the target with its rising black smoke and the bombs still falling over the area indicated that we had done our job.

I didn't have time to do much sightseeing. My eyes were ahead and on the lead planes to keep the formation tight. The radio was giving us clipt messages, sometimes overlapping, from the overhead fighters. "Watch your tail", "One below you", "Let me have him", "That's for Ed", "Go after him".

I don't know if official records are yet available on individual operations as we flew them. As I recall there were some of the B-24s that were disabled, but all managed to return to base. There were flack holes in many of the planes and while ours was dented, we

reported "No blood". We saw many Jap planes drop into the ocean and were indeed thankful that our "Boys" were keeping them away from us.

My records are from "Mission Plans" printed and distributed to Pilots assigned to each mission. What happened inside and with "My" planes and crew are recorded here for any who wonder;

"How did it happen?" and

"What did you have to do with it?" and

"When?"

April 25th was mission #25, South again, but to Boeloedoang Airdrome on the lower end of the Celebes. With (6) 2,000 lb bombs each, all four squadrons took off between 06:15 and 06:27 and headed for an assembly point which we left at 10:50; 24 planes in trailing formation. It must have been a solid runway to require the 1 ton bombs we were carrying.

This was a long way from the "Front Line" action on Okinawa, but for political reasons that may never be reasonably explained, McArthur had left command of the southern battlefield to the Allies under the young British Vice-Admiral Lord Mountbatten. There was a Task Force Landing planned and being assembled, that was to be larger than the Allied Normandy Forces.

Current events in England, Germany, Russia, China, and the Northern Pacific reduced the effective strength of the Invasion Force (Code named 'Zipper') from 7 Divisions to 6 Divisions by its "D" day set for Sept. 9. The goal was to land on Malaya and take it back from the Japs. Britain's loss of Malaysia to the Japanese (with Singapore and Kuala Lumpur) was considered a blow that demanded retaliation to restore their "position" with the World Powers.

The record of the actual landing has been almost "buried in the mud" of World History. Again for political reasons, the U.S. finally chose to ignore Churchill's begging for help in recovering "Their territory", in favor of all out invasion of the Jap Homeland.

However, in building up for the "Zipper" invasion it was necessary to establish bases on Borneo, and clear a path through the Java and Flores Seas and the Makassar Strait. This explains our April 25th mission to Boeloedoang Airdrome.

On April 27th we returned to the same area but our target was Madae, this time with 1,000 lb bombs. The 424th lead the group over the target at 10,000 ft and at 11:50 we headed for home. My equator crossing number 18, mission # 26.

April 30th was to the West coast of the Celebes at Malimpoeng. I was leading two "green" pilots; one on his first mission. Our tail position in the group put them at the very end of the flight, but the only Jap planes we saw were watching us from well out of range and only wanted us to get out of the area so they could get back on the ground before their gas ran out. Almost a daily amusement was to tune in Tokeo Rose and hear her describe the "Front line action". Her version would be;

"Japanese fighter squadron has engaged 18 L/R bombers over the Celebes with no Imperial losses."

The idea that the homeland was being defended on the Southern Front no doubt was encouraging to Tokyo residents who were running from fire bombs dropping on them.

The suspicions of untrained or definitely inexperienced Jap fighter pilots in our area was proving to be fact. The good ones were all being used (or saved) for the expected assault on Kyushu.

We also knew that no replacement planes or parts were getting to these islands.

Most of the Japs on the ground did not believe, or would not believe, that Imperial Japan was about to be give up. Their only training was to "Die for their Imperial Leader". Those in the air were not always so "Committed", but the ones that were, often created long lists of dead and wounded with their flaming expiration.

19

R & R -- (R E S T A N D R E L A X A T I O N)

Fourty missions was the expected tour of duty for air crews in the Thirteenth Air Force at that time. Some would not be able to fly all 40, and we were to learn that 40 did not always insure release from duty. Somewhere along the line was to be a period of R & R. A week of "Vacation" away from the rigors of combat.

Mine came after mission # 27.

May 2, 1945 Operations Order Number 10 was posted;

1. The following flight WP via best available route o/a 3 May 1945 to points indicated and to other points as may be necessary due to weather, mechanical repairs, or as may be ordered enroute by proper authority. Return to this station is ordered with the least delay, upon completion of administration duties.....

Nine names were listed by rank and serial number with mine at the head of the list. I was to be the Pilot with Bill Moody as my co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Brannon - Navigator, S/Sgt Young - Engineer, Capt. Hoerner - Asst. Engineer, T/Sgt Yuhasz (grampa)- Radio Operator, 1st Lt. Roger C. Morroco - Purchasing Agent, S/Sgt Bartalamucci, and PFC Vercarelli as passangers.

A war weary B-24, #273 had been field modified to serve as a cargo plane known as "Fat Cat". Our R & R trips were to combine business and pleasure. Lt Morroco was authorized and instructed to locate and buy enough FRESH produce, meat, milk or whatever he could find to load our empty "Fat Cat" plane for the return trip from Australia. He was one of those rare individuals who could find and strike a bargain for anything. He was a regular on these trips and knew his job. As Pilot, I was sort of like driving on a busman's holiday, but I would rather be "driving" than sitting on

a crate for 8 hrs.

Everyone was ready, and anxious, as we taxied out and onto the runway for the 01:00 take-off. Up through the scattered clouds we climbed on course to our 8,000 ft cruise altitude. The weather report told us to expect a 12 knot headwind until we passed through an equatorial weather front which would change the direction to westerly. Our destination was Townville, on the northeast coast of Australia. It was not considered too smart, with an unarmed, war weary plane on a "fun" trip with a "make up" crew to fly over enemy held territory, so our course was plotted along the coast over our secured areas. While I had learned to trust Bert to keep me posted of ground speed and drift, I also was alert to whatever landmarks (islands) should be visible and when. I intended to be wary of any new navigator. Our plan was to follow down the north coast of New Guinea over Wewak and Madang to Lae which was by now a rather well established air route and considered "safe" territory.

Without turrets, guns, ammunition and armor plating, the B-24 was able to cover over 200 mph (ground speed) and after the second and third hour I was gaining confidence in my navigator. As the sun came up, Madang was easily identified and then Lae. From Lae the course was direct to Cairns across the Great Barrier Reef to Australia and then to Townsville.

Radio clearance from the tower was given in "Ausrtlyian" talk. I had been warned about the short runway and the "mountain" at the end of it, which I could now see. Dropping down rather sharply over the -- hill -- to the end of the paved runway, the wheels rolled out for a rather smooth landing with room to spare.

While we were waiting for a bus, our Purchasing Agent gave

us some advice and suggested going with him to the Bank first to convert our Dutch (US Military) money into Australian Pounds, shillings and pence. The ride to the "town" and its bank were the first proof that this was Australia; the land underneath where EVERYTHING is upside down. All traffic was on the wrong side of the road and May was like November at home.

After folding the oversized Pound Notes (Dutch Guilders were smaller than US bills and these were larger) into our pockets, it was time to eat. We learned that Townsville had been serving as an Allied support base since the start of the war and thousands of military personnel walking the streets on leave had just about drained the town of all but Black Market merchandise. My visions of a roast beef and gravy plate with fresh salad and cold milk turned into lamb stew and bread with no butter. Rationed were butter, sugar, tea, meat and some other things that were making the locals more than a little unhappy and they weren't afraid to dump their troubles on everyone. Sugarless cookies and room temperature milk completed my first Aussie meal.

After a walk down the streets past several stores, rooming houses and hotels it was noted that there were more uniformed people in evidence than civilians. In a brief huddle, four of us decided to try another town.

Mackay was the next town south along the coast. We caught the bus for a ride to the train station where we learned it would take a whole day to ride the train (which didn't leave until next morning) to Makay. The friendly suggestion was to fly, as most everyone did, for the same price. It seems Australians were using ANA (Australian National Airways) as we use taxies. It was to become

evident why; the railroad was slow, and the roads were not paved or even graded as we expect them to be in the US.

We climbed the short ladder and entered one of the many DC-3s in service around the world... one that had SEATS for passengers. I became a tourist. Off to our left was the beautiful Coral Sea reflecting the white clouds and blue sky overhead. Not like our Atlantic or Pacific coastal waters, the surface was almost without waves or breakers and the coral sand bottom could be seen extending far out beyond the beach. On the right were rolling brown hills with evidence of streams winding through them to the coast, but they were dry this time of year. (fall) Winter was coming when rains would fill them and the hills would turn green. Trees (what few there were) had lost most of their leaves and provided little shade for the bands of sheep clipping the remaining grass at the roots.

Makay was a smaller town, but not (quite) buried with service men. A ride into town from the airport on an open-sided, right hand drive bus that reminded me of the San Francisco Cable cars... without the closed center section... (Disneyland is still using some of them), let us off on Sydney street in front of the Hotel Ambassador.

We were told that all their regular rooms were rented but if we would share with other service men, they would provide beds. Bill and I found beds at the end of a second floor hallway. (No fire regulations?) The bathrooms were at the other end of the hall so we weren't really in anyones way but we had first "go" when a bathroom door opened.

After 4 months of open air, uninhibited bathing and sleeping bare, this arrangement wasn't too hard to adjust to, except the

sheets did feel heavy. It was a relief to not have a mosquito net over the bed. Our plan was not to spend more time than necessary at the hotel anyway. We did eat in their dining room the first night but wanted to try different places to get a broader idea of how things really were in this Land Down Under.

The locals made every effort to entertain the troupes. Some of their ideas were "foreign" but by this time they were well aware of what the U. S. service men were after and were eager to oblige.... that is the fair sex was eager. The men were a most independent lot.

The Australians had been fighting THIS war longer than the US and by now every able-bodied Bloke was in, or had been in, the Kings Service. It seemed the only ones left on the home front were disabled and discharged veterans, overage shop keepers or pre-teen school kids, and there didn't appear to be very many kids. The women were doing almost everything.... ably.

One evening two of us accepted an invitation to a local home for dinner. The house; the room furnishings; the table setting and even the food, to me could have been a thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's house (without turkey) 20 years before. I think the family all enjoyed our company and "talk" as much as we enjoyed listening to their free and easy conversations. I'll admit there were times I was entirely lost in their meanings, but whenever I got up the courage to question some of their phrases, it usually turned into a great time of fun for them.... and us, as explanations were attempted. We had a great time.

One evening I joined several that wanted to go to a movie, thinking it would be good to see a "Real" picture again. The title

was not one we could remember seeing before. There was a short line waiting at the door (gate) when I arrived with two buddies and our self appointed "hostesses". When the door was opened, we filed in and looked about at the "seats". The "theater" turned out to be 4 walls (board fences) with the sky as the ceiling. The projector was under a three sided shed at the rear and the screen was (almost) as large as the one at Morotai. The "seats" were really rows of double-wide canvas beach chairs. (lounges); the canvas slung from the upper support about shoulder high, to the lower support rail under your knees. There were no arm rests even at the aisles. A 7' tall person might have been able to relax in this sling and see the screen above the row ahead, but it was a constant struggle for me to keep from sliding down to where only the sky was visible with no roof overhead. The show wasn't to start until well after the sun went down.... and the operator arrived. Some had come prepared with books or magazines to read while waiting. We talked and listened.

Above, and sometimes interrupting the surrounding conversation from time to time would be heard a rapid scratching sound. Wood, in eastern Australia was very scarce. Nothing was made of wood if something else could be used; not even matches. The Australians made and used "Wax Vestas" to light their fires and their cigarettes. These were a short length of fiber (string) stiffened with wax and a head that required a skillful rapid scrubbing on the rough side of the tin box to ignite them. Once lit, they produced a hot flame as the wax burned brightly, but soldiers on scouting patrol were not allowed to use them; they were a sure way of broadcasting your position from yards away.

I'm sure the film was one I had never seen, and I wasn't the

only one who didn't see it all. Interest was not always focused on the movie screen. When the "Show" moved from the screen to the moonlit "lounges", we chose to head back to the hotel.

One of the shops I was interested in was the General Supply store that reminded me of a hardware store pictured on a 1920 calender. With nothing really in mind to buy, I walked slowly up and down the aisles admiring the displays. The walls were covered with cabinets and drawers and the tables with hand tools and racks of shovels and rakes. I noticed the absence of harness and the abundance of sheep related tools; sheers, hooks, bells etc. There wasn't anyone else in the store but the proprietor, who was watching from the back, but had not asked me what I wanted. I began by telling him of my interest in tools and that I had noticed some were made in England and others made in Australia. This got him started telling me of the problems Australia was having with England.

Australia was capable of manufacturing almost everything they needed right on the continent with the raw materials on hand, but England had for years insisted on telling them what they needed, shipping it to them and adding on the transportation costs. When the Australians started manufacturing their own tools and goods at home, England started taxing the new manufacturers an amount more than the transportation cost. All very legal, but highly oppressive on the depressed local economy. (TAXATION).

Another example was the Wool Industry that directly affected everyone. England's famous woolen mills needed Australian wool to keep running at maximum capacity. All of Australia's wool, by royal order, was to be shipped to England's mills to be processed. In exchange the processed goods; blankets, pants, suits, shirts,

dresses, soxs.... everything made from wool, was sent back to them at a price to include transportation BOTH WAYS. The Australians were paying "The Crown" to maintain and operate their shipping industry. With Germany sinking ships like clay pigeons, it wasn't hard to understand why the merchants as well as the people were anxious for a change.

This shop keeper was among those chosen by the townspeople to represent them in the local magistrates council. After listening to him for a few minutes, I thought they had chosen the right man for the job. Before leaving his store I purchased a steel machinist's scale (Made in Australia) that rather tied the US and the Land Down Under together in one 12" ruler. One edge is calibrated in 16ths, 32nds, and 64ths of an inch. The other edge is marked in 10ths, 20ths, and 50ths of an inch. I've never seen another divided this way, and have found it most convenient in laying out or scaling drawings and parts.

From what I saw in the brief time we were in Australia, I can best describe it as a step back in time of about 15 years. The streets, houses, shops, merchandise, ranches and even the people presented a picture almost like a Movie Set. The people themselves seemed most anxious to change things; to move up with the rest of the world they were reading and hearing about, but this would have to wait till the War was over and their troupes came home.

Our taxi plane ride back to Townsville was just in time to help load the "Fat Cat" plane for the return flight. The Agent had succeeded in buying one farmer's entire field of fresh dug (by hand shovel) potatoes. From another he had found a dozen crates of lettuce. From a meat wholesaler he loaded two fresh dressed and

cooled beef, and a dressed hog. There were crates of carrots, green beans, apples and in the last 6 X 6 truck load were milk cans of fresh (cooled but not cold) milk. All was delivered to the plane on a strict time schedule and all hands were set to load (stack-hang) everything quickly so we could get into the air as soon as possible to keep things cold (cool). The last crates loaded were containers of Ice Cream packed with ice. I'm not sure how many, but there were cases of Rum and Gin and Scotch packed in with the produce. Lt. Morroco had been entrusted with the Officers Club Funds to re-stock the bar. "Fat Cat" was loaded.

Waiting to get a ride back to the 372nd Bomb squadron was S/Sgt John G. Booneman, an extra passenger going back to Morotai.

It was a relief to get back into the air again as we climbed to our 8,000 ft cruise altitude. While not really cold, a jacket felt good if the sun was not directly on you. My navigator had convinced me that he knew his job, so we headed for Cape York at the northern tip of Australia.

Flying over this treeless, roadless land we took turns studying the landscape below us. For more than three hours of flying, not one moving thing was seen on the ground below us. With the binoculars we could see some low plants (brown) but no rabbits, squirrels or birds. I could imagine what some rain might do to the the area, but the lack of trees or brush indicated that there hadn't been much of that for years.

While we were in the air a radio broadcast informed us that Germany had surrendered May 8th, the day before.

It was early morning when "Fat Cat" was taxied into its revetment and the ground crews hurriedly unloaded the plane and

delivered the "guarded" cargo to the refrigerated cold room and Officers Club. Our "dining room" was off limits to all but 424th personnel for the next few days while all joined the world in celebrating Victory in the Atlantic.

This gave new meaning to the term "Eating high off the hog". Spam took a vacation for several weeks. The re-frozen ice cream only lasted two days. The fresh milk lasted four days. Our baker had used some of the milk to make fresh coconut pies. The potatoes lasted two weeks and the other produce not much longer, but the fresh meat was rationed to last until the next scheduled "Fat Cat" trip.

The Club wasn't about to run out of "nerve medicine" for quite a while.

20

AUSSIES LAND BORNEO

As part of secret operation "Zipper", on May 11 we were helping to clear the path to Borneo by bombing another runway called Boeloedwang on the lower tip of the Celebes. I was leading the second trio of planes over the target at 8,000 ft dropping (6) 1,000 lb bombs followed by the other two squadrons. This was the first time the term "Co-ordinated strike" was used, even though in reality all could have been so described.

The May 15th mission was described "Ground Support". The location was Tarakan on the north east coast of Borneo. To me this was the sorriest mission I participated in. A routine take-off and assembly at 08:45 for the bomb run at 09:00 had me on the leader, Major Thomas' right wing. Bill Moody was pilot with another (made up) crew leading the second trio. Our secret orders at the last minute before take-off, were to follow the Majors lead. We each had a "grid map" of the target area (top secret) to refer to. Each of our 12 planes were carrying (30) 100 lb instantaneous fused bombs.

The first hint of problems came through a change of plan as we flew over the target and were ordered "DO NOT DROP". Below we could see fighter planes strafing the hillsides at 50 to 100 ft altitude..... OUR PLANES!

We followed our leader in a holding pattern off the coast while waiting for instructions from the ground control. Allied ships were below us with all guns trained on the hills about 4,000 yds inland. We were watching the invasion of Borneo. There seemed to be shells exploding all over the ground area. After circling for about 15 min, a radio call to the Major gave him a coded sector (on our map)

to drop 10 bombs ONLY!

While he went in by himself, I led the formation in the circle, wondering when my turn would come. I'll never know who it was that started screaming on the radio as his bombs exploded. It could have been the Japs on our frequency. I'll always hope it was. The Major came back into formation as we continued to circle.

There was a call to change radio frequency and then instructions to look for smoke signals to mark our forward troupes. The Japs had followed our frequency change and were listening. Smoke signals came up from almost every location on our map from the coast to the top of the hill. From our vantage point, there could have been Japs behind every Allied soldier as well as in front of them. Our gas was not going to allow watching this mess all day.

At the majors signal we closed up the formation and followed him in trail. With Jap bullets streaming out of the hills and Allied ground fire and shells bursting on the face of the ridges, we came in low along the length of the cliffs and scattered our load.

As we left the area and headed home, once more I was counting my blessings for not being down there with destruction ahead, behind and above and no room (or freedom) to move away from it. Again my thoughts turned to what could have been accomplished with our Gun Package plane.

Wetzel had been busy while I was in Australia and flying my assigned missions. We were given permission to "Modify" a B-24 with his gun mounts. Plane #290 had reached its retirement age and was officialy turned over to us to experiment with. Our first order of business was to paint an X in front of the 290 number indicating experimental aircraft. Ground crews had removed the bomb

sight and the radar equipment for use in other planes.

On the 21st of May we were ready to test the first side mounted 50s in the air. Operations Officer John Palmer posted an order for us to take 3 other Lts. up for a "demonstration". We were more than a little excited because we hadn't even had a chance to bore-sight the two guns yet.

We took off and headed for the island across the bay that was still officially held by the Japs, but there couldn't have been more than a dozen still living there, if that many. A spot was selected on the beach and Wetzel pressed the button. It was almost like plowing a furrow in the sand as the first two 50s came to life. I didn't get a chance to try it. The "visitors" took over like kids with a new toy. We flew as observers until the 2 cases of test ammunition ran out. Then the "visitors" turned it back to us to return to the revetment and they went chattering off to headquarters.

June 2nd I was again scheduled to fly leader right wing to Tarakan, Borneo. The official Australian landing was recorded as May 1st but another pocket of resistance had to be neutralized. This time (6) 1,000 lb bombs were needed. From only 6,500 ft we planted the "seeds" on target and cruised home again.

2 1

M I S - F I T C O.

The war was now supposed to be over in Europe. Reserve Air Force Officers who had not served enough time or flown enough missions to be released were dumped on us to "help win our Island war".

In early June an Air Force Major was driven up to our Operations tent about 15:00 in full dress Uniform. He stood in the doorway (no doors) while clerks were sweating at their typewriters (non-electric), several of us pilots were sensoring outgoing mail and Captain Looker and his Assistant were studying the next mission maps. Not one person in the operations tent was wearing more than shoes and sun tan pants. Why the jeep driver had not called anyone to attention may have been planned.

Shortly the desk clerk looked up, stood up and called "attention". As everyone looked up to see what "General" this could be, he barked "Give me your Name, Rank and Serial Number". Recording this in his little note book he proceeded to the next clerk with the same request, and then the next while we all were still standing at attention. When he came to the Captain, everyone knew there was going to be trouble. The Captain, with surprising restraint answered and asked who he was looking for.

The Major replied he was looking for everyone who wasn't wearing his rank..... and proper uniform. He was going to change this raunchy outfit into a proper Air Force Squadron. If anyone was seen without shirt, hat and rank displayed, they would be cited for insubordination.

Then he recognized the name Looker and announced,

"I am taking over this squadron as Comanding Officer" and handed

a piece of paper to the Captain. This guy had been transferred from the ETO (England) to our outfit by Headquarters without any advance notice to our group.

Captain Looker, in his amiable way, said "At ease, men" and read the order to us. He had been de-moded before, but I'm sure it was never quite like this. He dismissed us all to go to our tents for shirts, hats and insignia and return to our duties. He knew this "insignia" order was going to get around the whole group fast, without his help.

At the evening mission briefing, our new CO with his dress uniform, "Good Conduct", "Sharpshooter" medals and Pilot Wings was introduced with the reading of his "orders". By now everyone knew our "Family" was to be broken up. Permission was given to Capt. Looker (he was told) to proceed with the briefing in the usual way. Our new uniformed CO, with his polished wings and medals, was to "Observe our procedure" with his note book in hand. At the close of the session he announced he would go on the mission as an observer. A shudder went through everyone as they wondered "Is HE going to ride with US?"

It is often said we tend to forget the bad things and remember only the good. It may be for the best that I've forgotten this character's name. For the rest of the story I will refer to him as M-F (Mis-Fit).

I was called for briefing and a mission June 5 to Labuan (Native Village) on the north western coast of Borneo. This was to be one of our usual 12 to 13 hr missions with 3,100 gal of gas but some of the planes would be carrying Napalm bombs. Our new CO (M-F) had assembled his notes and announced his plan

"To win the war in the Pacific like HE did in the Atlantic". We must circle the field after take-off until everyone was in formation before heading to the Group Assembly Point.

At 06:19 I took off third in our squadron and dutifully lumbered around the field at full power while the others strained to get into position. Lt. Clark was leading and I was on his right wing. M-F was riding with Clark and calling the plays. Our orders were to keep our formation all the way to the Assembly Point. It could have been called a formation; we referred to it as 18 planes going the same way at the same time. At the Assembly point we were to circle and close up the formation (11:15 to 11:30) and proceed to the target (11:45) at 10,000 ft.

Close formation was ordered over the target and on breakaway. As we headed for home, no signal was given to leave the formation. We were to fly formation for another 5 hours on the way home. I moved out enough to set up the economy cruise but couldn't really get up the speed I knew we all needed to get home. Checking my gas gauges, I decided if no one else would break radio silence, I would.

This was my 31st mission and I didn't want it to be my last. I picked up the mike and asked permission to set my own cruise path home. Clark and Larson and Schmidt were all "old timers" too and as soon as I broke away, they all set up their L/R procedure.

The sun was almost down when the landing strip was sighted. There was another plane off to my right and another ahead of me. From somewhere behind me came a radio order to

"Form up".

"Circle the field and peel-off for formation landing". I asked Blessin how much gas we had left. He said

"None showing".

I hadn't forgotten the feeling of 4 engines quitting on landing. Ignoring the radio order of M-F, I set up for a straight in approach to the runway and eased it down. Only one engine quit as we rolled off the runway onto the taxi strip and into the revetment.

From our parking place we could see three planes.... almost in formation..... pass over us and swing around the field for a landing from the other end of the runway. As they made the final turn back toward the airstrip, two planes landed and both had to be towed off to the revetments..... out of gas. The third plane ran out of gas and fell into the water-----within sight of the runway. It didn't take a genius to figure out who was responsible for our only crash in over a month. M-F was getting more un-popular by the day.

The notebook M-F was carrying had entries behind many names, but somehow my name must have caught his attention after the no shirt encounter, request to leave formation and ignoring his formation landing order. On the next mission I was to fly lead plane of the second trio. M-F was pilot of the lead plane. I think this was the first time he actually flew as pilot on any of our missions. After the fiasco of losing a plane in home waters, his formation take-off and landing idea was scuttled.

Our Assembly coordinates were listed above an island that we had used several times before. At the designated time both my wingmen were in place and at their lower altitude the second squadron was forming. Nowhere could we see M-F or his two planes. A call came over the radio..... from M-F.....

"Where are you? We are waiting for you to join us".

There were a few scattered clouds, as usual, and I began to

wonder if he was hiding behind one. All eyes scanned the sky but we could see no other planes. Our printed orders were to leave the Assembly point at 11:20, so I headed for the target with my wingmen and the other squadron following below.

Halfway to the target, radio silence was again broken with the message

"Leaving Assembly point without you".

The cloud layer over the target was getting thicker but we could see enough to make our bomb run and the report was "bombs on target". I led the group on the breakaway and with no evidence of fighter planes, we headed for home. We landed almost an hour before M-F and we were still filling out the mission report when M-F came storming in to the briefing room.

"You did not form up with me at the Assembly Point".

"You were not authorized to lead the squadron".

"You could not have hit the Primary target... the clouds were too thick to see it". (He had dropped his bomb load in the ocean because he couldn't find the secondary target....on the way home.)

"I ordered you to form up with me and you ignored my order. I'll have you up for Court Martial".

I didn't think it necessary to respond to any of his statements. My wingmen knew we were where we were supposed to be, and a statement (off the record) from one of his wingmen (and both navigators) confirmed that he was lost and they were just letting him have his way. They felt safe enough as long as they knew their way home. They only stayed together to protect his crew and the plane..... no way would they even try to protect M-F.

Nothing ever came of the Court Martial threat, but for "some

strange reason" my mission records were missplaced and did not get filed after M-F was "in power".

One crew, three tents away from ours, had obtained a monkey and were attempting to "tame" it for a pet. Weeks of "training" the monkey on the end of a chain had resulted in training US more than IT. The monkey spent most of its time in a tree beside the tent, or on the top of the tent. Anyone walking the path between the tents was in for a shock as the the waiting monkey would jump down on any shoulders passing, grabbing ears, nose or chin and ride the terror stricken pedestrian to the end of his chain.

It particularly liked someone with a hat it could grab and jump back out of reach. If someone came by with a pack of cigarettes in a shirt pocket, that monkey would snatch them and EAT the contents with glee. When not wearing a shirt Wetzel (and others) carried a pencil behind his ear. The monkey also thought it great sport to grab any pencil, chew the eraser off and then threw the pencils back at anyone in range.

It didn't work out..... but detailed plans were studied to get our Uniformed M-F to walk down that monkey path.

Before the month was ended, so was M-Fs tour with us. He left as he came.... without announcement. Our Captain was in for a promotion to Major as he got his desk and his CO job back.

Everyone celebrated..... without shirts or hats.

2 2

O P T I O N S

The next 10 missions were almost routine. Borneo had hot spots that needed softening. The Australians and the "Zipper" forces were setting up staging bases and needed our help from the air. The magic number 40 mission was coming up, but as it approached, the thought turned to; "We might not make this one". With every mission now I was determined to see my crew members finish up and be sent home. Some of them had worked in 4 or 5 extra missions with other crews. In fact all of them had flown more than I had. At this point none of us had reported any scratches and were determined to keep it that way.

One of our duties as officers was to serve as censors of outgoing mail. With three or four of us on duty at the same time, I always made it a practice to pass my own crew member's mail to another officer. It was bad enough to read a stranger's love letters to their wives or girl friends. These reading (and clipping) sessions were making me think more of my waiting girl friend and how long this "Job" was going to last.

Secret reports were being "Leaked" that the fighting at the front was not going as planned. Islands that were to be quickly taken over as necessary forward bases were fortresses held by Japs with only one purpose; kill every invader as you die for Japan. Thousands were dying on the ground and the end was not in sight. Only God could stop this madness.

I began listing my options. (1) I was asked to consider accepting the position of Squadron leader with an immediate promotion to Captain. This would call for another 40 (or more)

missions. Or.... (2) I could continue working with Wetzel on the gun package with the hope that its acceptance would qualify us for transfer to Wright Field, Ohio and Engineering positions. Or.... (3) I could drop everything and go home.

Replacement crews were not coming in as hoped. We were suspecting that all the new crews were being sent up north. The facts were, B-29 airplanes were now in production and they were designed to fly twice as far with double our load at double our speed and altitude. New crew training was in the B-29s. The only replacements we did get were individual transfers from the ETO who hadn't flown enough missions yet to be eligible for release.

As soon as it could be arranged, each of "my crew" members were loaded onto ATC planes and sent home for release with Air Medals and battle ribbons..... to lay in a drawer for their kids to find years later.

I agreed to lead a few missions with make-up crews while I was trying to decide if I really wanted to keep blowing up runways and buildings and "boats". I didn't give much thought to the changing demands for the B-29 to replace the B-24 and the obvious retraining to pilot them. This would be in line with my starting request to "Fly the biggest planes available".

Just for fun one afternoon, I agreed to take a B-24 up for "slow timing". Four new engines were installed in a plane and needed to be "run-in". Everything had to be checked out following a set pattern of power settings in the air before approval to join a combat formation. Three hours of reduced power in the tropical cottony sky with no place in particular to go but play with the clouds. At 130 mph it was almost like walking from one to the next

and blowing a hole through it. Some had dark centers which were like plunging into rain showers you could turn off by ducking back out into the bright sun.

As I came out of one dark cloud, the engineer pointed out my window excitedly. There was an Aussie in a Spitfire with his wingtip overlapping mine about a foot, and flying formation with me..... "tight" formation! I didn't know those planes could fly that slow! He stayed with me through the next three or four clouds and then looped to come in behind again, flying first above and then below my wingtip. Then he waved as he streaked away in a peel-off. I decided it best to stay out of the bigger dark clouds if the Aussies were going to hide in them too, but it was fun while it lasted.

More time was being spent with Wetzel and our X-290. The parts we had formed and fitted for the gun package were now ready for heat treating to finish them for final assembly. July 23rd we informed an interested Headquarters Officer that this was the next operation. Without hesitation he handed us a note with his signature authorizing us to take "our" plane to Taclobin, Samar and use "any and all facilities necessary" to finish the parts.

Our trip to Tacloban and the "authorization" signature gave us access to the necessary furnaces to heat treat (harden / temper) the soft aluminum parts I had made up. It also gave me a chance to see a very poor part of the Philippines that had suffered from war damage and was now being used as an operational base for several different services. This whole area seemed little more than a swampy jungle, but it had served as a toe-hold to secure Layte and provided a base allowing the approach to Manila from the south. Our X-290 was re-fueled with only a signature on the fuel tag, and we returned to

Morotai.

Not only did we have our own 4X4 truck, but now we had our own B-24 to fly "Where ever for what ever 'necessary'". We also had "requisitioned" lumber (including some balsa 2X4s) and built an engineering/supply tent on the flightline close to our X-290 revetment. Our stack of used 50 cal machine guns and ammunition tracks and boxes was getting too big to carry on the truck all the time. The 20 mm cannons were going to be more difficult to find. Early one afternoon the answer to our 20 mm gun supply "fell in our lap". Six war-weary night fighter planes landed and lined up on our parking apron for refueling. Wetzel spotted two 20s in each plane and offered to transport the ferry pilots and their leader to their transient quarters for the overnight stay. In his usual engaging conversation, he asked permission to remove the guns, as long as the planes were to be salvaged at Biak anyway. The flight leader saw no reason to deny Lt. Wetzel's request. His orders were to deliver the planes to Biak. Nothing in his orders said anything about guns or equipment. A crew was quickly engaged in removing the guns and ammo tracks we figured might be needed to finish our project, with spares, and before dark we had a truckload of "big guns".

Next morning we thanked them again and watched as the formation took off and headed south for Biak. Less than 30 min. later they were back on the ground. Not one of us had considered the effect all that "iron" had on the compasses. In formation they soon realized each plane was indicating a different compass heading. Which compass should they follow? It took two days for the ground crews to "swing" each plane and compensate (correct) the compasses so they could find Biak.

Headquarters officers were watching our progress closer than I realized. We no sooner had the 20s mounted and ammo tracks connected than a line officer appeared to "help" us "sight in" the side guns. The next morning was scheduled for in-flight testing. Wetzel and I arrived at the plane and run down the usual ground inspection procedure. Four officers from rivaling "offices" drove up and announced.....

"We'll take it from here".

I read the message. They didn't need me. With their ready permission I chose to stay on the ground. Wetzel was not about to give up his project or miss the action. He climbed aboard with them.

His less than enthusiastic report of the test was enough to convince me that we had created a new toy for frustrated pilots at headquarters who were stuck behind desks and wanted a new angle to work up a change in assignment for themselves. They didn't let him try his own creation.

The first time I saw the new P-51 fighter plane up close was when a squadron landed for fuel and an overnight stop. These newest planes were faster and more maneuverable than anything yet in service. The pilots were "hot"..... and thirsty. They made a trade with the ground crew for a dozen cans of beer hidden in the engineering shack. The squadron leader flipped open the wing ammunition compartment and stowed the warm cans in the empty ammo box. He climbed into the plane, yelled "Clear" and headed for the nearest entry to the runway. I had never seen a plane take off so near to straight up from the ground. He was out of sight in seconds. I turned my attention to the sleek "wing with an engine" and its giant 4 blade prop. Within 15 min the airborne plane was back on

the ground and swung into parking position. The pilot climbed out and opened the ammo hatch. Those beer cans were almost frozen solid. Handy freezer.... when expence isn't considered.

(Page a8 of pilots manual?)

These events left me thinking of my third option, GO HOME.

On Aug 6th the world heard but did not understand the word "Atomic Bomb". A B-29 had dropped the first "A Bomb" on Hiroshima, Japan. The Japanese Military had been preaching and demonstrating "Die for the cause", so death to them meant "Victory". When the second "A Bomb" was dropped on Nagasaki 3 days later, the effects of the first had not begun to be realized by anyone. Wild guesses were broadcast as to what effect this new "engine of destruction" would have on the war.

Acres of down town Tokyo were being destroyed by fire bombs from hundreds of B-29s every day. *

Now two "bombs" had done more damage than weeks of Group bombing.

At this point, no one could be sure what the outcome would be. Reports were "Unbelievable". Eye witnesses in the air could not believe what they saw, or understand what really happened on the ground. First reports from the ground were unable to convey the extent of the instant destruction.

* PS. I had no way of knowing that a two day raid of B-29s over Tokyo destroyed 267,000 buildings in March or that 5,765 B-29s bombed Japan during the month of July. On Aug 1st, 784 B-29s were over Jap targets for a one day record. (Official USAAF records.)

D E C I S I O N

After I had chosen to let Wetzel go on the trial run in X-290 without me..... and listening to his report of the Headquarters Brass taking over the plane, something inside me said;

"You should have seen this coming. Those men are Professionals with more experience at using the 'system'. You've had your fun.... now get out and let them have it."

I reminded Wetzel that my commitment was to make up his parts for him and this was done. Assembling the package now could be done with the help of others who had joined our project. He was still determined to finish..... and try for an appointment to Wright Field. He knew I wanted to go home.

Next day I walked into the COs (tent) office and asked

"What do I have to do to go home?" He reached into his desk drawer and pulled out my file. He was ready for me.

"Catch the next ATC plane for Manila".

"I've been wondering when you were going. You could have gone weeks ago when you decided not to accept Flight Leader."

"I'll have your orders ready for you to catch the morning plane."

I converted the last of our pantry stock into cash; packed up my things into the B-4 bag and duffle bag; "willed" my hand made furniture to another pilot (without any) and went to sleep on my army cot for the last time. After breakfast I loaded my bags (and my saxophone) into a 6 X 6 for the last ride to the Morotai flight line. As the C-47 took off I pointed my camera out the window for a last look at the field. I was going HOME.

24

R E T U R N

The C-47 landed in Manila Aug 13th and I checked in at the transient officer's camp. (Tent) I had in mind spending some time in the area to see what destruction the Japs (and Allies) had done to the city. Next morning, Aug 14th, every newspaper boy and every radio was blaring the news..... Japan Surrenders. I stood in the chow line with the others to get some breakfast and word was passed quickly that many in the line were waiting for a place on a plane going back to the states..... any plane.

I finished my powdered eggs and coffee and got a ride to the airfield. As I entered the ready room a clerk was tacking a notice on the bulletin board.

"All Air transportation TO the United States
cancelled until further notice."

I asked to see the Officer in charge and asked his advice on the best way to get out of Manila. He told me all planes were ordered to stand by to transport occupation troupes and "VIPs" to Japan for the Surrender ceremonies. His suggestion was

"Find the first troupe ship going East and get on board."

I "hurried" back into town and found my way to the docks. There was only one ship loading and when I finally got up to the counter and showed my orders, they informed me that all staterooms were assigned..... but if I would share a room with 3 other officers, there would be passage. I quickly agreed and was issued a boarding pass. The Dutch ship M.S. Tjisadane was due to leave for San Francisco at 16:00 next day. This left me little time for sightseeing but at least I had a way home.

It was almost harder to get away from the ticket office and dock area than it was to get to it. Everyone was crowding to get into the office for a ticket. I found a truck going downtown and started my sightseeing tour of Manila. My walking tour was started at the downtown landmark building called the Treasury. Once the pride of the Philippines used for the Senate, the stone walls were scarred with holes from mortar and artillery shells. With temporary coverings over the larger holes the building was a bustling center of activity as an administrative headquarters. The streets were cleared of rubble enough to move Jeeps through them between the banks of broken rock, concrete, steel and wood.

Any direction you looked were acres of building frames that had been burned and blown apart and whole sections with only the rubble of flattened buildings. I walked toward the historic old walled section known as Intramura that was built as a fort inside the city. Control of the fort had changed with Jap occupation and part of it was used by the Japs as a prison camp. Against "War Rules" the Japs in many places held their prisoners close to their operational headquarters or supply areas with the thought (hope) that the Red Cross marking would keep "US" from the area. This was using prisoners as their shield.

While it is true some of our bombs and shelling did damage some sections of the city, by far the most destructive damage was done by the Japs as they determined to leave nothing useable behind them when they were retreating. Power systems, water and drainage systems, communication systems, streets and bridges were intentionally and systematically destroyed as they were forced out of the city.

I climbed over the bulldozed piles of crumbled building materials and entered the once beautiful arched doorway of the Dominican Church. Dozers had cleared the floor of fallen beams and roofing and windows. What was left of the skeletal walls and parts of the towering ornate front section still spoke of the God of Hope and Faith and Life..... not "Death" as the glorious end of all people.

I got a ride in another 6 X 6 going out to Nielson Air Base, one of my bomb targets. The runways had been reworked and had been in use for some time. There was a giant hanger-like tent stacked full of supplies and what seemed like acres of crates and containers and stacks of army cots that hadn't yet found their way through the "system" to foot sore and tired soldiers. The big event of the day was going to reverse the system and a new career enterprise would soon dominate the marketplace... War Surplus sales.

At one road intersection was a canvas water "tank", (about the size of an adult swimming pool) along side the road with a line of Philippino kids (they are all small enough to be kids) waiting to fill their buckets with "safe" water for home. The houses were really huts built up on four poles with the floor about 5 feet above the marshy ground and the roof covered with thatch. A ladder leaned at an angle up to the front door opening and the window openings had no glass, only shutters. These farmers had been stripped of everything by the Japs and the men had been forced to fight in the Jap army leaving only the women and children to exist as best they could. Even their gardens were raided by the Japs. Chickens, ducks, pigs, cows, horses and dogs were the only meat, and no way to replace any that were confiscated or killed for food.

In the next clearing was the remains of a Zero plane half buried

in the soft rice field. A carpenter was sawing a board to repair his roadside fence with an 18" blade lashed to a handle like a baseball bat. The board was leaned against the fence and his foot was holding the lower end as he drew the short blade toward him with both hands on the handle. Slow but effective way to rip a mahogany board.

I returned to the transient camp to write letters telling of my new plans and to get in the evening chow line. The local Philipinos were not supposed to be in the camp but with all the surrender celebration they wanted us to know how happy they were that "McArthur return"..... "You save us"..... "No more fighting". While anyone listened, their little hand was out for a coin, or a ration packet, or a cigarette or piece of candy. They would take anything. It was obvious they had nothing. Several girls came through the area selling bananas.... fresh off the stalk. The local fruit was just their size.... small. One soldier traded for three or four and said he would buy more but these were all too small. Next morning the girl was back with a dozen that were about 6" long advertising "American size bananas." She sold them all.

At the end of all chow lines is placed two or three GI cans to empty mess kits or trays into (garbage cans) before rinsing and washing them. I'll never forget the sight of a gang of Philippino kids watching those cans. Ducking the guard, they would dash up and pick out and eat whatever was in the the cans, and then run away with armloads and handfulls to share with the more timid waifs waiting outside the fence. .

The frenzied activity throughout the camp didn't allow much sleep that night. I certainly didn't want to "miss the boat" so hurried through the breakfast chow line and piled onto the truck

going down town. Carrying the bulging duffle bag over my shoulder and my B-4 bag (and saxophone) I walked up the inclined gang plank well before sailing time. It was already crowded with service men. I was directed to a stateroom on the upper deck about mid ship and stacked my stuff on an upper of the two doubledeck GI beds against one wall.

There was hardly room enough to turn around. The room was intended for only two people and one double bed, but from my upper bunk I could see through the port hole to the railing with people walking past the window. I hung my AF Argus camera on my belt and started a walk around to get my bearings. The crowd on the walkways and deck prevented moving fast so I worked my way over to the railing and decided to watch the proceedings from there. A second gangway entered the ship closer to dock level, and on it were the enlisted men with all their gear. It began to look as though the line of soldiers yet to board was growing longer as the steam whistle sounded.

At the announced time the Shore Police cut the line off at the dock and as soon as the gangplanks were cleared, a second whistle blasted in our ears and the planks were moved away from the ship. Those still in line were going to have to wait for the next boat. Even on the upper deck we could feel the engines start and see the smoke rise from the huge stack. Lines were cast off and the tug boats nudged the huge ship away from the dock and out into Manila Bay. The engines picked up our speed as we headed for open water.

I went back to the room and found I would be sharing it with an Infantry captain and two Navy Ensigns. Seemed proper to me that the Air Force should have an upper bunk. The captain spent a lot of time

sleeping, and we didn't disturb him much. The Navy spent a lot of time complaining. The accommodations weren't up to their standards. The Fresh breakfast eggs (Real) had been in cold storage too long. The fresh fried potatoes tasted of fish oil. The showers only had cold water.... and it was SALT water. We had to do our own laundry. I began to wonder if the Navy had been fighting our war.

We were still in sight of land when an empty (damaged) Victory Ship started following close along side us. The Navy boys lost no time in questioning the Bridge as to what was going on. Ships orders were to escort the damaged ship to Wake Island on an evasion course (with lights out) just in case there were Jap submarines still in these waters who didn't know (or believe) that the war was supposed to be over. This required running at less than half speed. Another complaint.

We were ordered to remain on the upper two decks at all times. Enlisted men were not to come up onto our decks. This ship had been a luxury liner converted to troop transport for the war. The all Dutch crew and the West Indian deck hands seemed to be doing their jobs well, in spite of the Navy boys opinion. What appeared to be a large raised hatch covered over with waterproofed canvas was really a large swimming pool that was converted to fresh water storage. (not drinking water) The dining rooms and lounge rooms had been beautifully decorated but military use had rather dimmed the finer appointments. The halls and some of the staterooms were paneled with beautiful polished Mahogany. The deck was of well scrubbed teak. The steel parts were now due for scraping and new paint. (Just the thing to make the Navy boys feel wanted).

At Wake Island we straightened our course and left the

Victory ship on its own as our engines pushed us up to speed for San Francisco Bay. A notice on our bulletin board asked for signatures of any who wanted to join a Ships Orchestra. I signed up with about 12 others and was given a room number on the after deck to meet for practice. I was rather surprised how many had instruments with them. Such as it was, we formed an orchestra and were almost immediately called on to play for a dance on the forward deck. There were Wacs and Waves and Nurses on board that I hadn't seen till now. A couple of days later it was arranged to clear a place on the enlisted mens deck for a dance. I could now see why we were not to go onto their decks.

They were packed in like the famous sardines. They had to take turns on the open deck. The girls made their evening dance a real success. The orchestra may not have been rated best but we did our part for the war effort and I think we all enjoyed playing. We were kept busy trying to keep up with the dozens of requested tunes, most of them played with no printed music. As I recall there were dances scheduled almost every other day, some on the top deck and most on the lower deck.

The closer to San Francisco we got the rougher the waves were. At times the waves seemed higher than my port hole but by the time I got ready to climb out of my upper bunk there was nothing but sky showing out of the hole. I didn' get sick (many did) but out on the forward deck watching the waves pitch us up and down, I thought I could see the Ferallon Islands ahead as we slowed to an almost stop. Then the engines picked up speed again we swung south along the coast. The Captain announced over the loud speakers that there were no piers open at San Francisco. Ships were waiting in line to dock

with no assurance of how long the wait would be. He had permission to proceed to San Diego where docks were available.

Sept 24th I walked down the gang plank with all my stuff and sent a Telegram to the Folks to tell them that I was in San Diego and the train should get me to Beale Air Force Base, Marysville next day.

Sept 25th I joined the ranks of Air Force service men in line for furlow and discharge. It took 3 days to convince them that I didn't want to re-enlist. As a Commissioned Officer I could not be discharged as enlisted men were. As a United States Army Air Corps, Commissioned Officer I was pledged to be "on call" as long as there was a need for my service. However my service records allowed granting an "Inactive status", subject to re-call. That served my purpose.

Sept 29th the Folks drove up to Marysville and welcomed me back. It was good to be home again. Since last seeing them in December, it took me 4 days to get to the South Pacific. I spent 564 hours in the air on 47 recorded combat missions, crossed the equator more than 30 times and flew over 109,000 miles of water not counting the fun trips, all without a scratch. It took me 40 days to get back to California.

This completed my tour of active service to "Uncle Sam" as a "HAND" in the Air.

2 5

H O M E

It's not easy to stop "going." Sept 30 was Sunday. We all went to Rev/ F.B.Smith's Gospel Tabernacle to worship with them and give thanks for God's miraculous protection.

October 5th I left Stockton in the old faithful Packard to get me a wife. Norma was waiting for me in Cedar Rapids. We were married October 13th at 13:00 and the 10 day trip back to California was our honeymoon.

Sept 30,1991

N 10/11/91

Chronology

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| March 1943 | Lincoln, Nebraska |
| Apr-Jun '43 | Cedar Rapids, Iowa |
| Jul-Sep | Santa Ana, Calif. |
| Oct-Dec | Phoenix, Arizona |
| Dec-Feb '44 | Lemoore, Calif. |
| Feb-Apr | Pecos, Texas |
| Apr-Jun | Albuquerque, New Mexico |
| Jun-Jul | Lemoore, Calif |
| Jul-Nov | Tonopah, Nevada |
| Nov- | Hamilton Field, Calif |
| Nov-Dec | Fairfield/Suisun, Calif |
| Dec 5 | 03:00 Fairfield |
| Dec 5 | 17:00 Hawaii |
| Dec 6 | 05:00 Hawaii |
| Dec 6 | 11:30 Palmyra |
| Dec 6 | 17:00 Canton |
| Dec 7 | 06:00 Canton |
| Dec 8 | 11:30 Tarawa (Cross date line) |
| Dec 8 | 18:25 Guadalcanal |
| Dec 9 | 08:00 Guadalcanal |
| Dec 9 | 16:45 Biak |
| Dec 11 | Lae, New Guinea |
| Dec 16, 1944 | Lt. M. Lloyd Vanciel plane crash. |
| Dec 28 | Wewak, New Guinea |
| Jan 3 | Morotai |

| | | | | |
|---------|-------|---|------------------------|------|
| 1/12/45 | | Bivouac Area at Nuzon & San Vincente | | |
| | 10:25 | 8,750 ft | 14--46' N - 121--11' E | (1) |
| 1/14 | | Grace Park A/D Administration & Barracks Area | | |
| | 09:45 | 15,500 ft | 14--47' N - 128--05' E | (2) |
| 1/18 | | Miti Supply Area | | |
| | 07:00 | 8,100 ft | 01--39' N - 128--05' E | (3) |
| 1/23 | | Cavite Sea Plane Ramp | | |
| | 12:20 | 16,100 ft | 14--27' N - 120--49' E | (4) |
| 1/26 | | Canacao Pt. Installations | | |
| | 12:20 | 15,000 ft | 13--46' N - 120--39' E | (5) |
| 1/29 | | Canacao Pt. Installations | | |
| | 12:30 | 13,800 ft | 13--46' N - 120--39' E | (6) |
| 2/1 | | Canacao Installations (No take off) | | |
| | 12:25 | 13,900 ft | 13--46' N - 120--39' E | |
| 2/4 | | Canacao Installations | | (7) |
| | 12:40 | 12,000 ft | 13--46' N - 120--39' E | |
| 2/7 | | Shipping Strike | | (8) |
| | | 12,000 ft | | |
| 2/11 | | Corregidor Gun Emplacements | | (9) |
| | 12:35 | 9,500 ft | 14--14' N - 120--39' E | |
| 2/14 | | Corregidor Gun Emplacements | | (10) |
| | 12:20 | 8,500 ft | 14--14' N - 120--39' E | |

| | | | | |
|---------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|------|
| 2/17 | | Miri A/D | | (11) |
| | 12:25 | 10,500 ft | 04--47'N - 113--43'E | |
| 2/19 | | Miri A/D | | (12) |
| | 12:40 | 9,750 ft | 04--47'N - 113--43'E | |
| 2/21 | | Sandakan R/W | | (13) |
| | 11:05 | 9,000 ft | 05--52'N - 118--16'E | |
| 2/25 | | Tawau A/D | (Raft search) | (14) |
| | 10:50 | 9,000 ft | 04--14'N - 117--53'E | |
| 3/4 | | Zamboanga Barracks Area | | (15) |
| | 10:14 | 12,000 ft | 05--50'N - 122--02'E | |
| 3/8 | | Zamboanga HDQTRS & AA Position Area | | |
| | 10:20 | 12,000 ft | 06--50'N - 122--03'E | (16) |
| 3/18 | | S p i n A/D | | |
| | 11:45 | 13,400 ft | 01--14'N - 117--01'E | (17) |
| 3/21 | | Cebu City 13A & 13B | (Raft Search) | |
| | 10:30 | 7,500 ft | 10--14'N - 123--48'E | (18) |
| 3/24 | | Cebu City Pers & Supp Area #3 & #12 | | |
| | 11:30 | 8,000 ft | 10--14'N - 123--47'E | (19) |
| 3/26-27 | | Mokmer (Biak) | | |
| | | Deliver crew to pick up new plane. | | |
| 3/31 | | Delin A/D runway | | |
| | 13:00 | 9,000 ft | 03--52'S - 114--25'E | (20) |
| 4/6 | | Jolo Personnel Area | | |
| | 09:45 | 8,500 ft | 06--13'N - 121--03'E | (21) |
| 4/12 | | Finschafften | | |
| | | Cut & form parts for Gun Package | | |

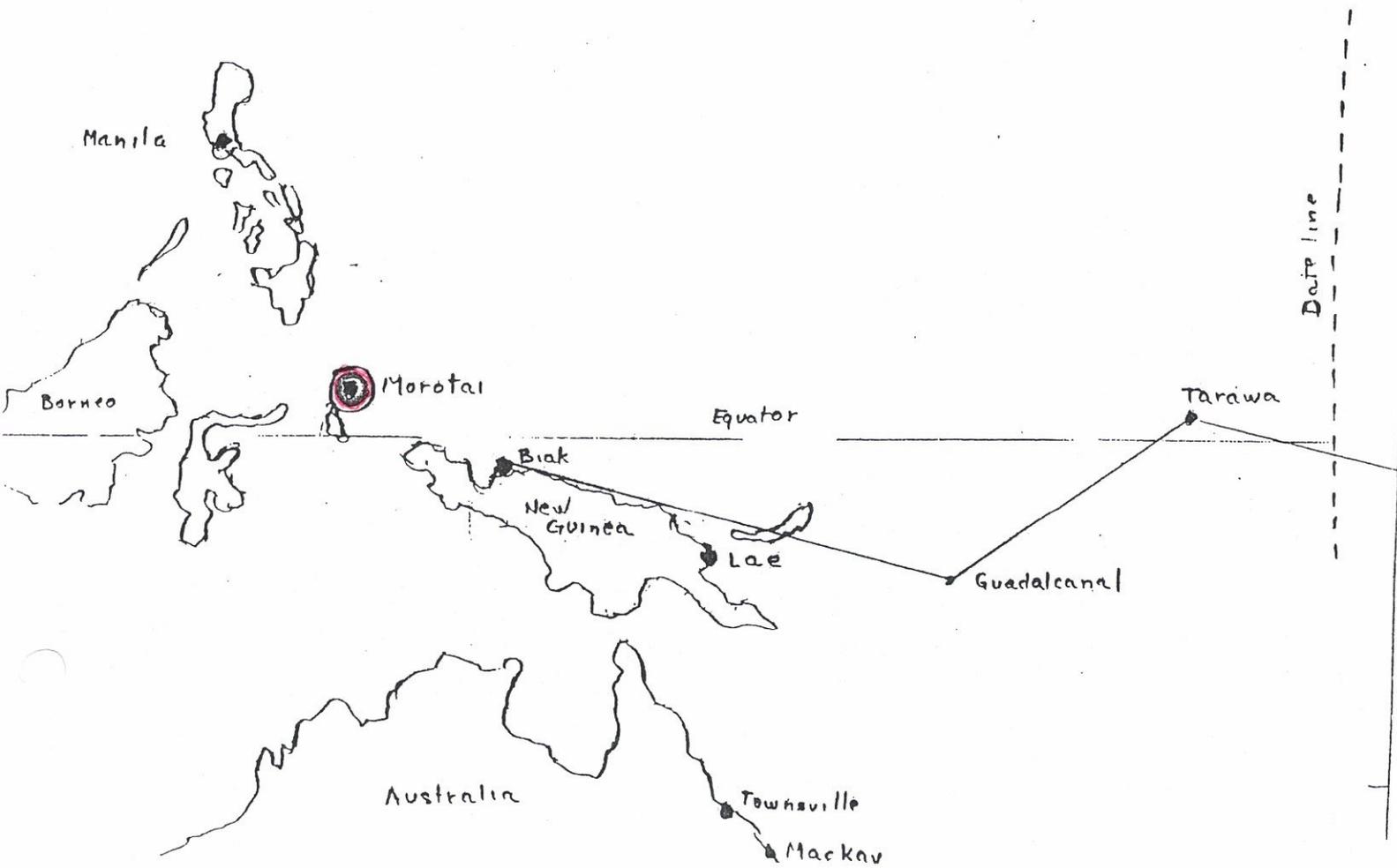
| | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------|----------------------|------|
| 4/15 | Shipping (Scouting) East coast-Borneo | | | |
| | T/O 11:00 | 14,000 +/- | 01--00'N - 120--20'E | (22) |
| | | | 02--30'S - 116--30'E | |
| 4/18 | Cotabato Target # 8A | | | |
| | 09:20 | 8,500 ft | 07--24'N - 123--50'E | (23) |
| 4/22 | Shipping Balikpapan 424 lead (#4 plane) | | | |
| | 11:15 | 16,000 ft | 01--19'S - 116--46'E | (24) |
| 4/25 | Boeloedoang Airdrome | | | |
| | 11:15 | 9,000 ft | 05--38'S - 119--25'E | (25) |
| 4/27 | Madai Area | | | |
| | 11:30 | 10,000 ft | 05--02'S - 119--41'E | (26) |
| 4/30 | Malimpoeng | | | |
| | 11:15 | 9,000 ft | 03--54'S - 119--43'E | (27) |
| 5/2-5/9 | Australia R and R | | | |
| 5/8 | (Germany Surrender) | | | |
| 5/11 | Boeloedwang Runway | | | |
| | 11:30 | 8,000 ft | 05--38'S - 119--35'E | (28) |
| 5/15 | Tarakan (Ground Support) | | | |
| | 09:00 | 8,000 ft | 03--30'N - 117--42'E | (29) |
| 5/21 | Practice Mission (X290) | | | |
| 6/2 | Tarakan | | | |
| | 10:00 | 6,500 ft | 03--21'N - 117--27'E | (30) |
| 6/5 | Labuan Native Villages (Formations--T/O & Lndg) | | | |
| | 11:45 | 10,000 ft | 05--12'N - 115--21'E | (31) |
| 6/8 - 7/2 | Records lost ? (10 missions) | | | (41) |
| 7/23 | Tacloban (Heat treat & finish Gun Pkg parts) | | | |
| | 4 days | | | |

| | | | |
|----------|-----------------|------------------------|------|
| 7/29 | Records lost ? | (7 missions) | (47) |
| 8/8 | A-Bomb | Hiroshima | |
| 8/9 | A-Bomb | Nagasaki | |
| 8/13 | Tell folks | Comeing home | |
| 8/14 | Japan | surrender | |
| 8/15 | Leave Manila | on M. S. Tjisadane | |
| 9/24 | Telegram | home from San Diego | |
| 9/25 | Beale A.F.B. | California | |
| 9/29 | Release | Furlow --- Home | |
| 9/30 | Rev.F. B. Smith | church AM & PM | |
| 10/5 | Leave Stockton | for Cedar Rapids, Iowa | |
| 10/13/45 | Married | | |

BATTLE RIBBONS and CREDITS

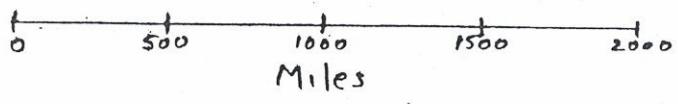
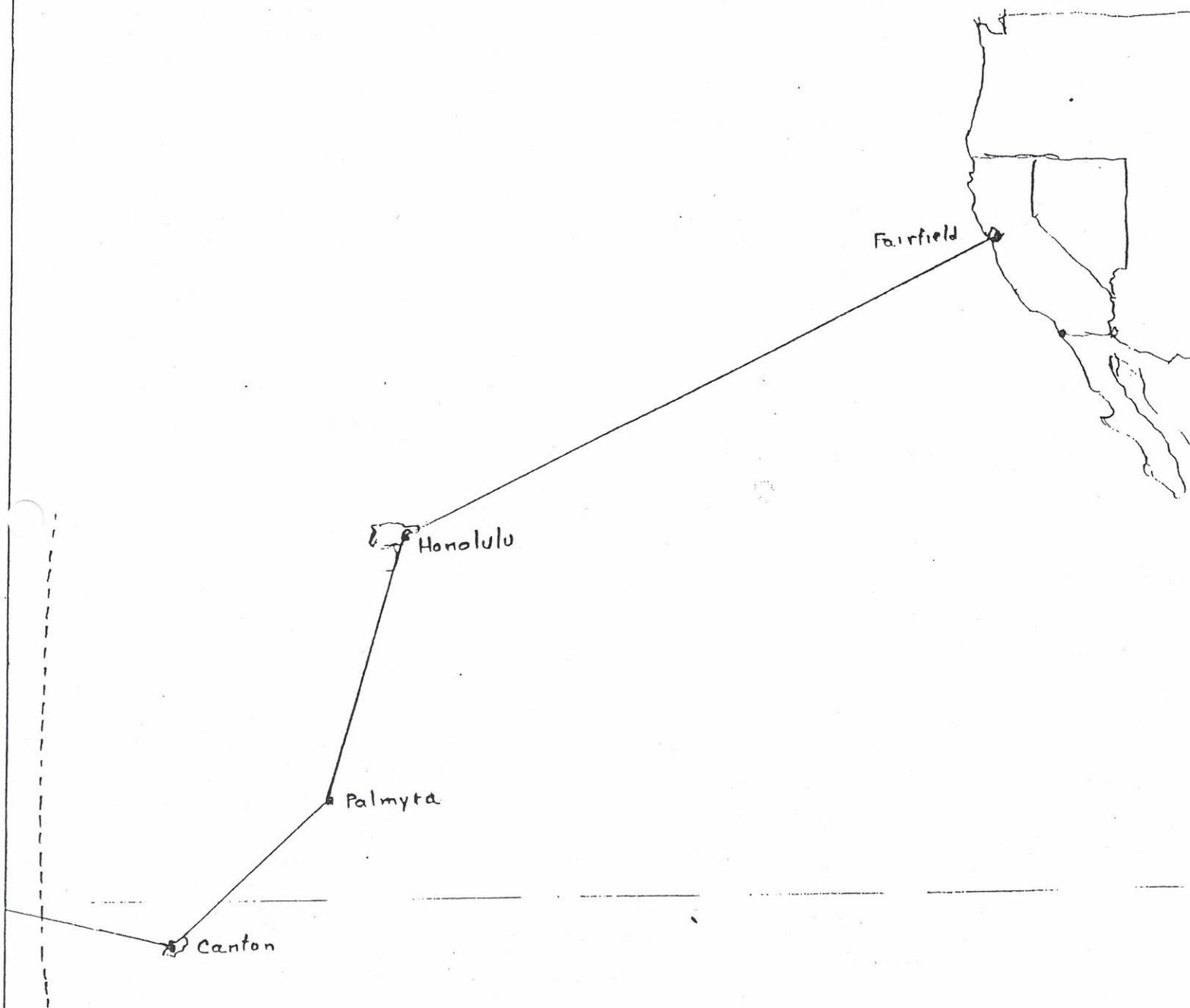
| Asiatic-Pacific Campaign | Award |
|------------------------------|---|
| New Guinea | Star |
| Bismark Archipelago | Star |
| Southern Philippines | Star |
| Luzon | Star |
| China | Star |
| Air Medal Far East Air Force | Medal |
| 100 Air Hours | 2 B. Oak Leaf Clusters B. Oak Leaf Cluster |

2 M



3 M

T



T



Philippines

Manila

Guam

Ulithi

Palau

Truk

Zamboanga

Morotai

Tarakan

BORNEO

Celebes

Biak

NEW GUINEA

Wewak

Rabaul

Lae

Java

Sumatra

Singapore

Australia

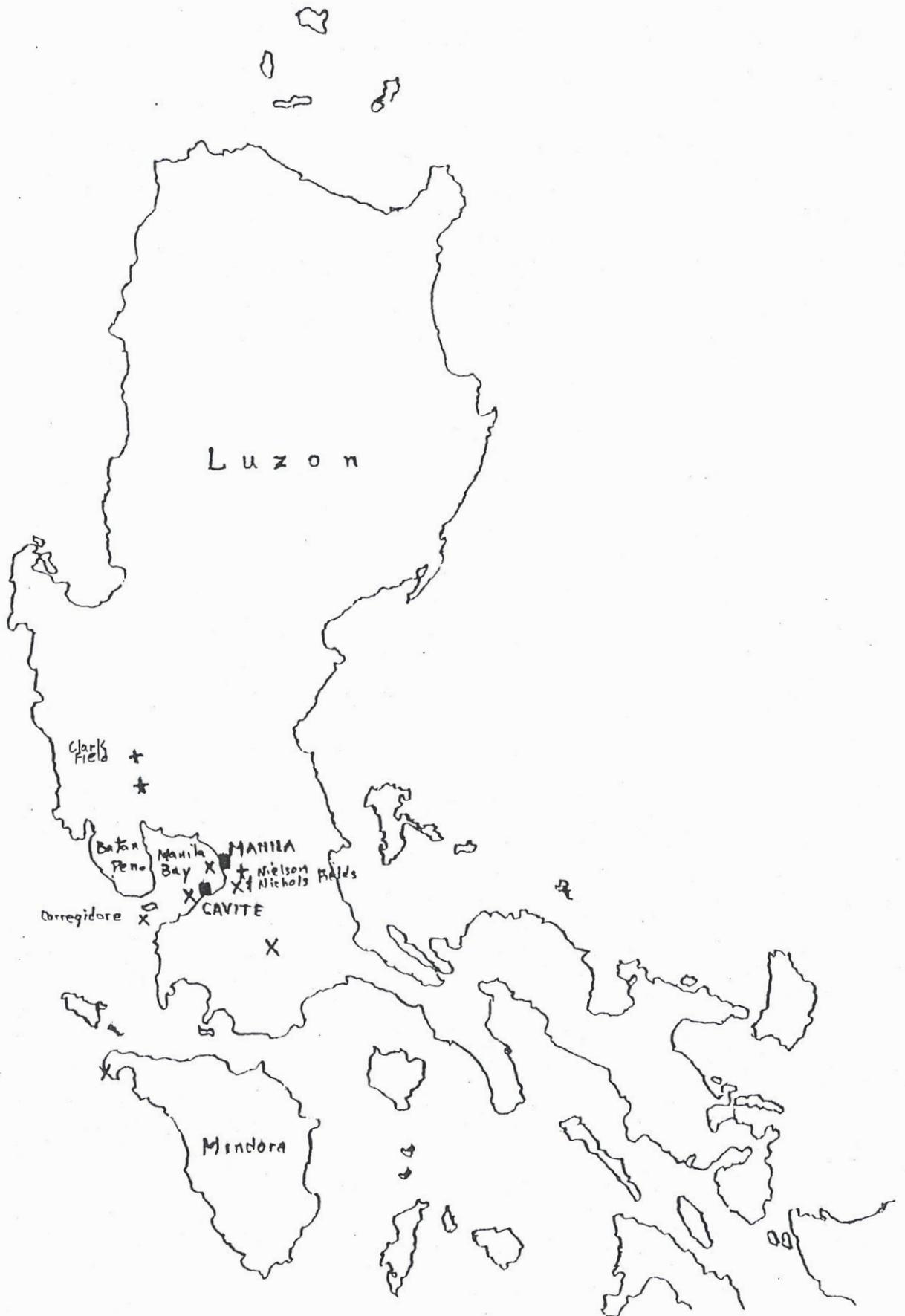
Townsville

Mackay

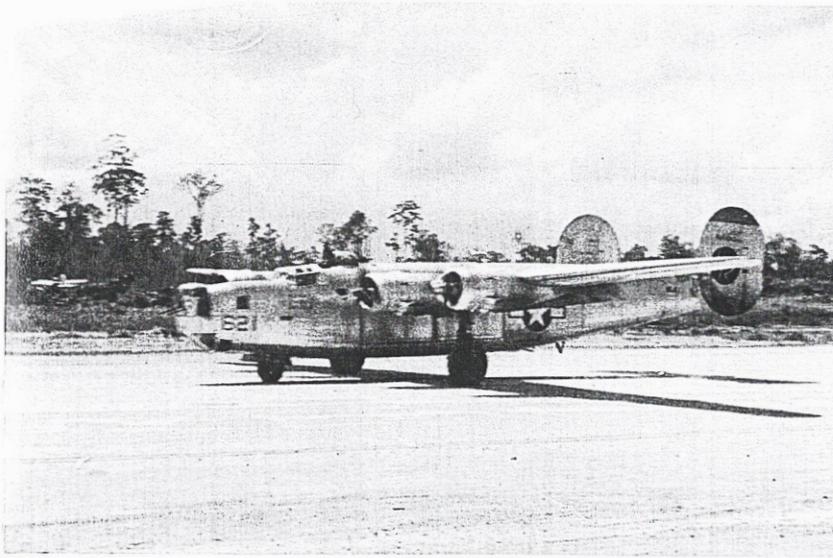
Miles

0 250 500 750 1000

W H

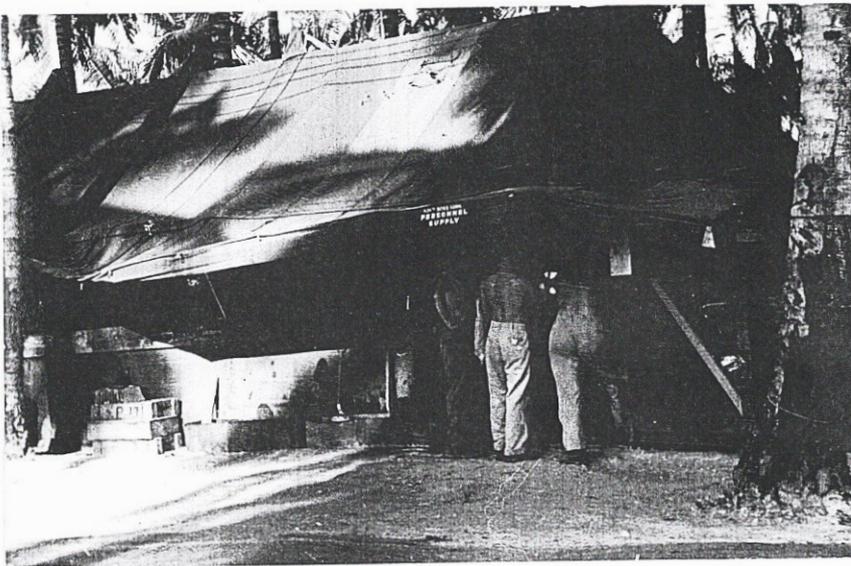






#621 rolls toward end of Pitoe Strip after a short mission. Sky and shadow indicate a noon hour landing on Morotai.

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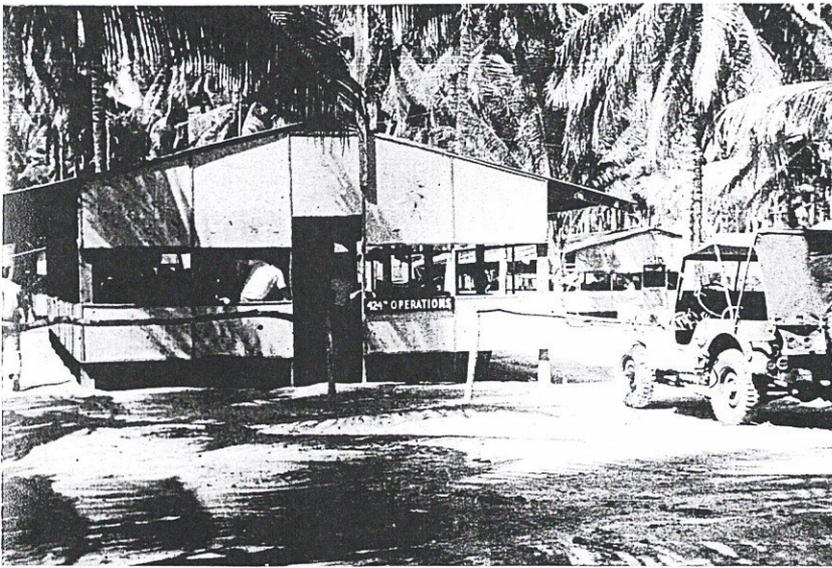
Drawing supplies from squadron supply tent on Morotai.

Page 107



Ship in bay, showers on right, tent area on left & behind. "Convenience station" foreground.

Page 107



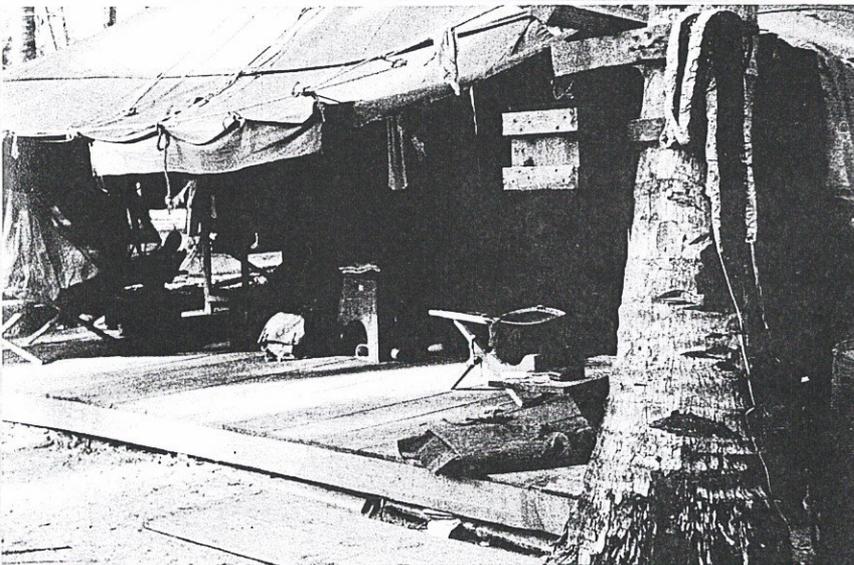
424th Operations Bldg
Wood frame construc-
tion/ wood floor, tin
roof/ canvas or ply-
wood wall panels.

Page 107



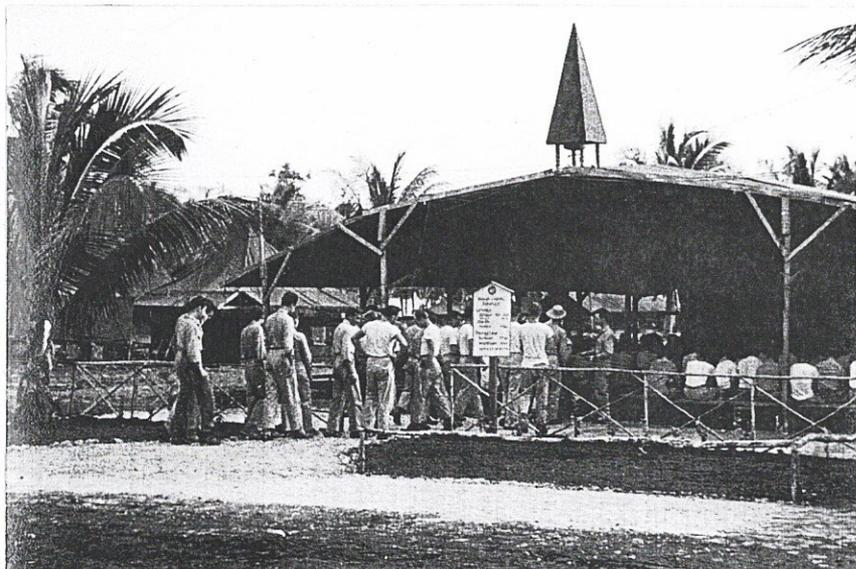
One of many bomb
shelters in tent area

Page 123



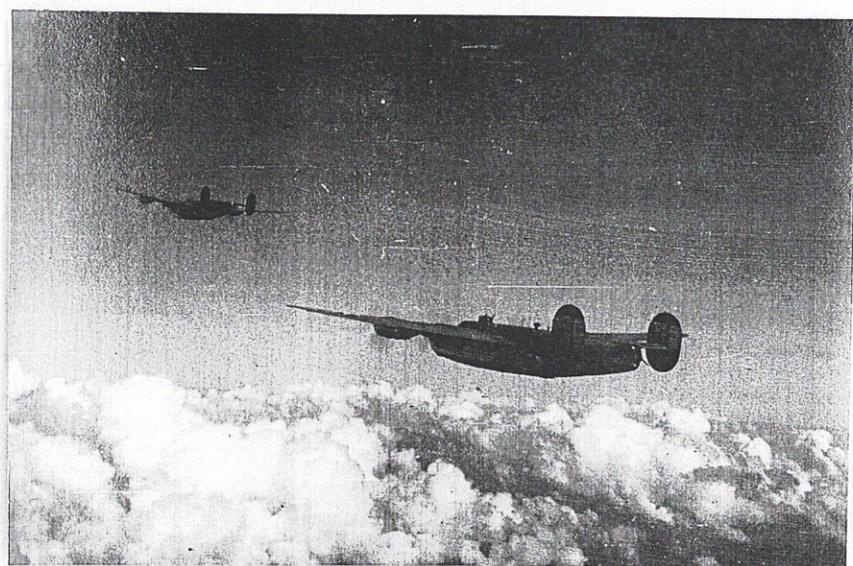
My Morotai "Home away
from home". Note
raised floor and
netting over cot.

Page 107"



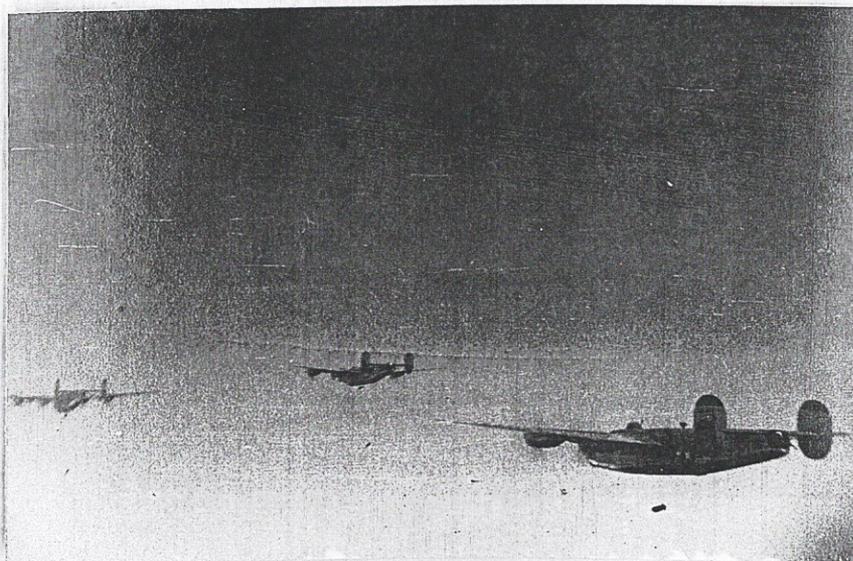
Well attended Chapel for all faiths. Often combined Catholic, Jewish & Protestant services to overflow crowds.

Page 107



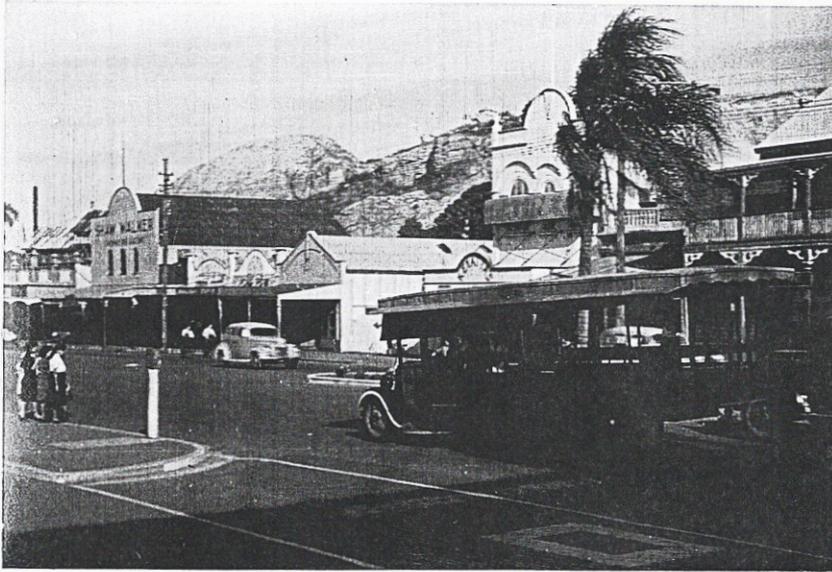
In formation on way to target. Flying above 2,000 ft cloud blanket.

Page 116



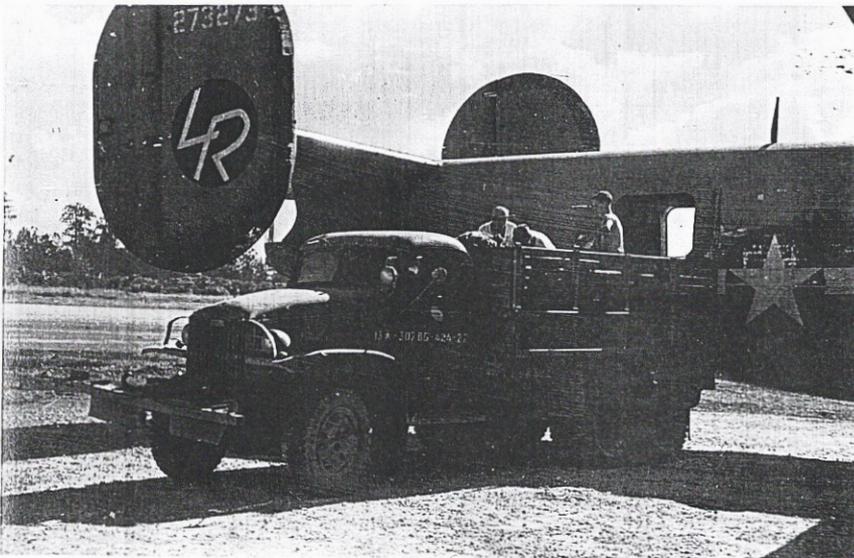
"Bombs Away". Count 5 bombs dropping into cloud blanket. Note time interval between bomb releases. (Flack burst above center plane).

Page 112



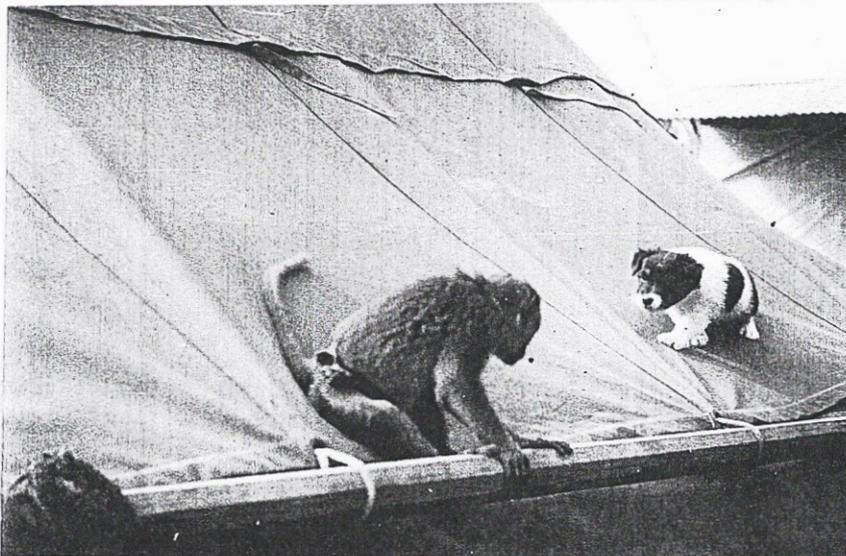
Mackay, Australia bus service.

Page 162



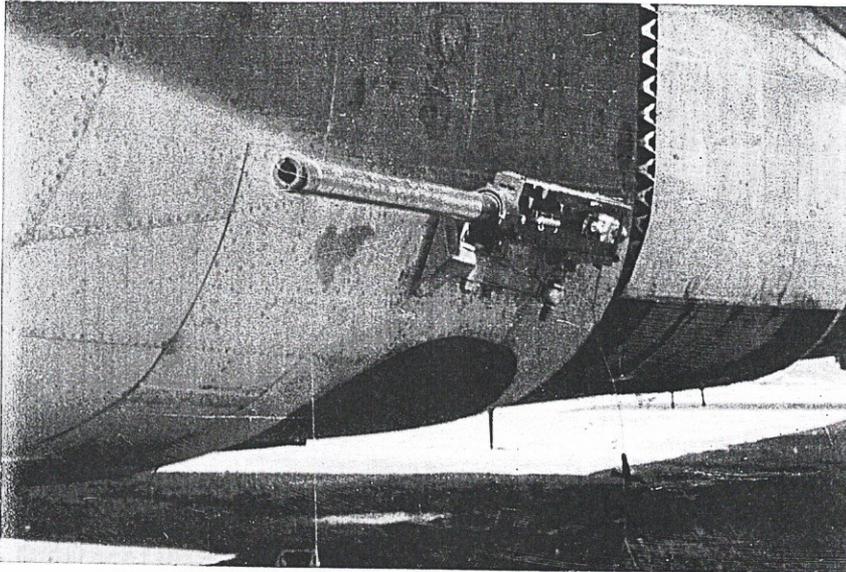
One of four truck loads onto "Fat Cat" #273 at Townsville after 6 days R & R in Australia.

Page 166,167



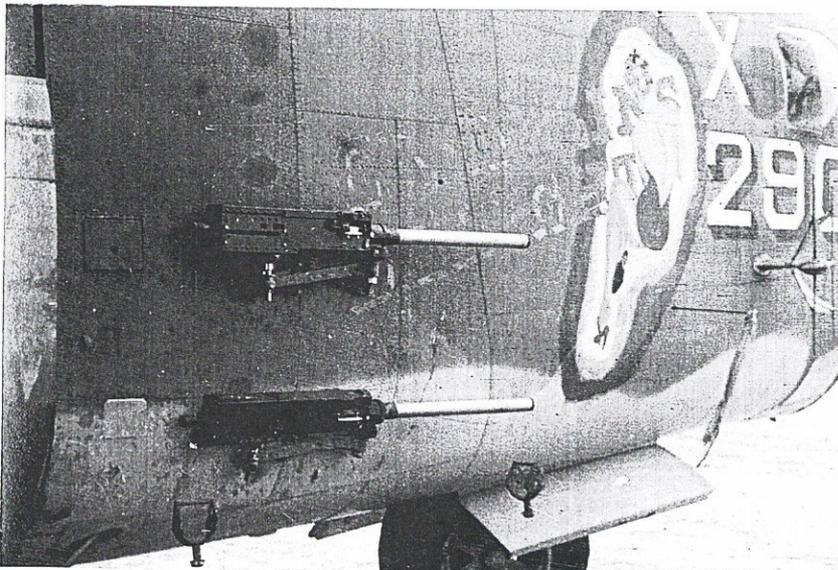
"Pet" monkey on his tent top set to give playmate (dog) a bad time while audience watched "What would happen".

Page 117



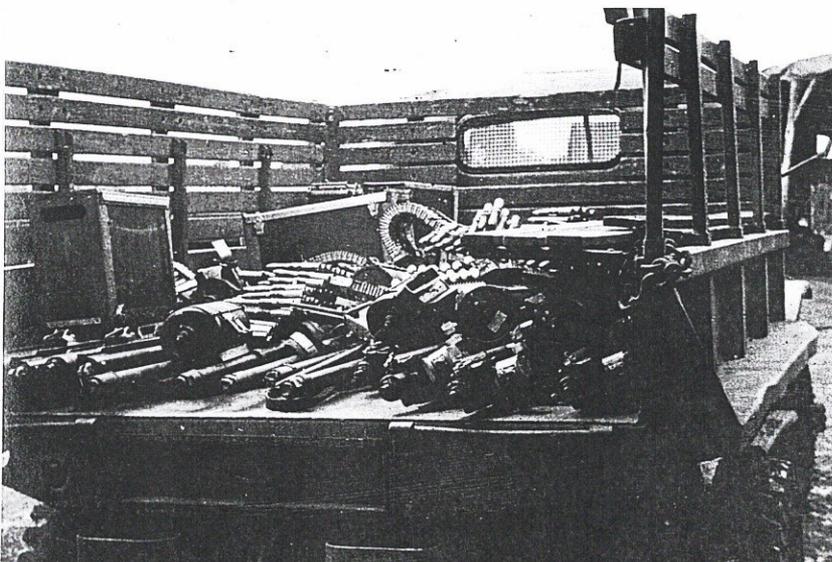
First 50 Cal. gun mounted on left side. Cutout (below) where Radar antenna dome was removed. Aux. gas tank still in L. Forward Bomb Bay.

Page 170



Two 50s mounted on R. side ready for test. Plans were to add a 20 mm canon above on each side also, all fired by the pilot.

Page 170, 171



Load of 20 mm canons and ammo. tracks/boxes on "Our" 4X4 truck. Removed "With permission" from returning war weary night fighters.

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