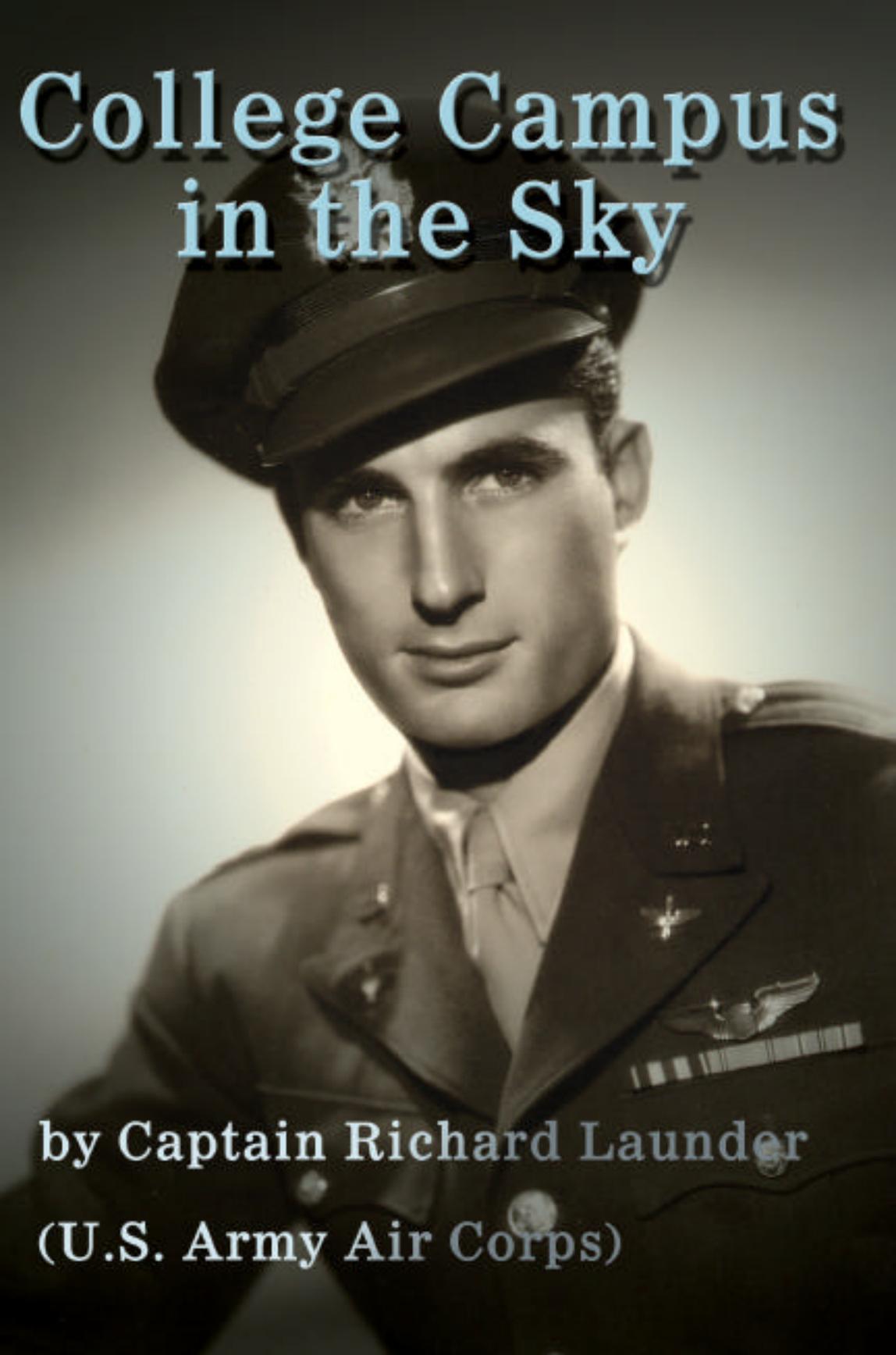


College Campus in the Sky



by Captain Richard Launder
(U.S. Army Air Corps)

College Campus in the Sky

College Campus in the Sky

*Captain Richard Launder (U.S.
Army Air Corps)*

Writers Club Press

San Jose New York Lincoln Shanghai

College Campus in the Sky

All Rights Reserved © 2001 by Richard Launder

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the publisher.

Writers Club Press
an imprint of iUniverse, Inc.

For information address:
iUniverse, Inc.
5220 S. 16th St., Suite 200
Lincoln, NE 68512
www.iuniverse.com

ISBN: 0-595-72378-0

Printed in the United States of America

March 17, 1941

Hi guys! Hi gals! Let's celebrate the day
Twas 60 years ago we raised our hands to pray
To offer all we had in life, a cup as yet unfilled
To be our Country's knights astride our Pegasus
instilled

With courage, will and devotion we came,
unmindful of the price
That some of you were asked to pay, your future,
more, your life.

"But we're not here" you say? Oh, yes you are you
each and every one

You always will be by my side to rejoice in what we
won

I've shed a tear along the way for you who fell
behind

But never fear, you're here today right near the finish
line

So Guys and Gals, today's the day we say it's all
been grand

We're all together once again, to go on hand in
hand

Contents

Preface.....	vii
CHAPTER 1 War Clouds Over the Horizon.....	1
CHAPTER 2 Welcome to “The Force”	15
CHAPTER 3 It Rained on our Parade.....	18
CHAPTER 4 We’re ‘Yanks’ for the Next Eighteen Months	21
CHAPTER 5 Let’s Get in this War	26
CHAPTER 6 The Spice Islands—Beautiful but Pathetic ...	29
CHAPTER 7 The Force Attacks	34
CHAPTER 8 The Bugler Blew Retreat	42
CHAPTER 9 Let’s Get the Hell Out of Here!	46
CHAPTER 10 A New Name—A New Home	48
CHAPTER 11 Back in the Saddle Again	50
CHAPTER 12 There’s Light at the end of the Tunnel.....	54
CHAPTER 13 Am I Dreaming? A New Airplane.....	59
CHAPTER 14 The Lights of Lae.....	65
CHAPTER 15 Goodbye Australia, Hello Los Angeles	70
CHAPTER 16 Put on Your Traveling Shoes	74
CHAPTER 17 Over There	78

CHAPTER 18 Pilot Heaven Here on Earth 84

CHAPTER 19 It's What We've Been Looking For 88

CHAPTER 20 Saving Lives Instead of Taking Them. 91

CHAPTER 21 Let's Live in France Awhile 93

CHAPTER 22 Stop Shooting at Me—The War's
Almost Over! 98

CHAPTER 23 We won't be home for Christmas, but we'll
Have One Hellova New Year's Eve Party 101

CHAPTER 24 Winding Down 104

CHAPTER 25 Homeward Bound 106

Preface

The pipes wailed their way down Broadway, the Chicago River ran green, half the country was drunk; all in celebration of that great Saint of the old sod, Patrick. Irish-Americans have distinguished themselves in the field of Patriotism ever since the birth of our Nation. To name a few, Patrick Henry, Butch O'Hare, the Sullivan boys, Audie Murphy, Gen. McAuliffe the head 'Bastard of Bastogne whose word was immortalized when he replied to the German demand to surrender. "Nuts." They do not 'head' a list, rather they are 'on' a list of a diverse breed of Americans who answered the call to arms, to face the professional armies of the enemy and defeat them. Who were these guys who flew off into the wild blue yonder, learned their trade the hard way, by experience, and in quick time became the scourge of the professional pilots of Japan and Germany. For the most part, they were the college kids across America, working their way toward being a part of a great society advancing in peace. Instead, they found themselves on the College Campus in the Sky, shooting at Mitsubishis and Messerschmitts, words they couldn't even spell a year before, much less 'kill'... What a credit they were to our American values and our way of life. This book is dedicated to them, these young heroes, who gave up so much because it was the right thing to do. This story tells of one of them, but it really is the story of all of them. I, for one, will never forget them and wish them Godspeed wherever they are.

War Clouds Over the Horizon

There is a particular date in my life, which marks two never-to-be-forgotten events, both of which commemorate the beginning of “something big” and it’s usually printed in red on the calendar. March 17th is a red-letter day and a half for me. The rest of the world celebrates St. Patrick’s Day. I celebrate my entry into the Army and, years later, the birth of my daughter, Patricia.

The first time around was in the year 1941. It was the spring of the year in Southern California, the weather was pleasant and life was routine. Not so in Europe. The war was raging in the skies over London, The British were on their backs and the outcome was in doubt.

What I had been waiting for had come a few days before....” report on March 17, 1941 to March Field, California for induction”. I borrowed my Mother’s car and drove to Riverside. The ramp in front of the hangar-line was filled with B-17’s, a sight, which really quickened my pulse. The silver birds belonged to the 19th Bomb Group, which I was destined to meet up with in Java months later. There were about ten guys there all holding up their hands and swearing to defend the Constitution and the U.S.A. I didn’t know it at the time, but James Pedro Patrick Larronde was one of them. The Patrick is for St. Patrick’s Day, his birthday, March 17. After the formalities of enlisting in the Army, we were given our orders to report to flying school. It turned out to be Cal Aero Academy in Ontario, California, a private school operated by civilians and owned by a Major C.C. Moseley. Moseley, himself, was an old flyer of World War I vintage, Lafayette Escadrille and all that glamour. He paled around with guys like Eddie

Rickenbacker, Roscoe Turner and Billie Bishop, who incidentally was the honored guest speaker at our commencement exercise from this “boot camp” some months later.

To best understand how I wound up as a Flying Cadet, let’s go back a couple of years to the campus of the University of Southern California (USC) and the activities that played a roll in my decision to become a flyer. A “student” I was not, directions I had none, time and effort was to be spend in the pursuit of happiness, isn’t that what the Declaration of Independence says? Well, I did plenty of pursuing that goal. The activities of the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity were more enduring remembrances than chemistry, math and history of civilization, although some of that must have worn off on me as I did “pass”.

In the spring of 1940, a program hit the school called Civilian Pilot Training Program (C.P.T.P). The Government, in its infinite wisdom, decided that pilots would be needed soon, lots of pilots. The reason for this move was completely over my head at the time. There was a war in Europe, but that was half way around the world and no concern of ours, or so we thought.

As an example of this, our fraternity meetings were held on Monday nights from 7:00-9:00 p.m. After a lot of heavy discussion concerning who might get black-balled among the pledges, or how we were going to get a “ringer” into the inter-fraternity track meet next week, most of the “non-students” made a bee-line for the Hofbrau, a Nazi sympathizing beer joint on South Figuora Street near the University. Posters in the entry ridiculed President Roosevelt, praised Hitler and the Wehrmacht and displayed every anti-Jewish slogan imaginable. We all thought it was funny, and the beer was good. Besides, they served minors.

I enrolled in the first class of C.P.T.P. The ground school was held at night in a classroom at the University and flight training was conducted at the Gardena Airport on South Western Avenue. A couple of nights a week we studied theory of flight and all those things beginners learn. When we knew why an airplane stayed in the air, we were given

the opportunity to see if we could do it. I must confess, I took to handling an airplane like boys take to girls. It wasn't much of an airplane; a canvas covered two-seater powered by a lawnmower engine, called a Piper Cub. But it went up in the air and flew like a bird. My flight instructor was an old, in flying time, not age, barnstormer who finally landed a steady paying job. His name was Chet Chenowith and if that doesn't sound like an old crop-dusting, hell-raising flyboy, then there weren't any such things. I never did hear if he had a nickname, he probably did, as most flyers of the day were called something besides their given names; Buzz Wagner, Blackjack Walker, Buck Rogers, Pappy Gunn to name a few. The course lasted about six weeks and ended with our check ride with a CAA Flight inspector and award of a private pilot's license. Chet was an innovative sort who tried a little psychology to make himself look good as an instructor. To the student making the highest grade on his CAA flight examination, Chet offered an all expense paid ride in his personal airplane to some town in the Nevada outback. The place was called Silver Peak and was home to a handful of hard-rock miners. Anyway, the prize was up for grabs and the two leading candidates were yours truly and a guy named Jack Vogel. Chet had turned me loose after only the minimum eight hours of dual instruction during which time you are mostly shooting takeoffs and landings. My solo ride ranks high on my all time thrill list, not that anything went wrong but rather because everything went so right. With that ride I acquired a confidence in my ability to fly an airplane that never left me. It was a good beginning. Standing around waiting for a CAA check ride was cold sweat time. I wasn't worried about flunking the test as much as losing points to my archrival, Vogel. To a kid with a total of thirty-five hours airborne, the sight of a khaki-clad, mustachioed, riding-booted CAA examiner striding your way with a clipboard in hand is a bit frightening to say the least. His name was Ben Calvin Scott Jr. "Your instructor tells me you can fly this thing, let's go". The flight went well enough, although I wasn't doing things as well as I could. He had me tense because he wouldn't talk except to

order a maneuver. This wasn't good old comfortable Chet sitting up in front of me. Chet told me it was a good ride, but I didn't know that I had beaten out my competition, Vogel, until the last day of the class when we were all assembled in front of the field shack. "Launder finished first in the class and wins the prize". Man, that was a proud moment.

The prize, Silver Peak, Nevada! Chet had an old five seat, high wing monoplane called an Aronca. He kept it out on a dirt strip in Monrovia, California, which today, of course, is a housing tract. Take off was scheduled for early morning on a bright October day. Chet, his brother and two other guys were waiting when I arrived bundled up in a fake fur coat and a snap-brim hat. Into the wild blue yonder we went, up the Owens Valley past Bishop to a landing on a dry salt marsh next to the mining camp. The landing site was big enough to land the space shuttle; the only structure within miles was a tin covered hangar on the edge of the lake.

We parked the crate next to the hangar and headed for "town". An interesting kind of a place, sort of a step back in time; ramshackle wood structures that looked like they were growing out of the side of the hill. The local saloon had a card game going on an antique table almost as old as the players. Chet knew some guy there, which was what this trip was all about in the first place. After a few beers at the bar, his brother, who was supposed to be a pilot, I guess, got itchy and talked Chet into letting him take a spin around the lake in the Aronca. He invited me along but I preferred the atmosphere in the saloon. I sensed that Chet wasn't too hot for this idea; you could tell by the way he was giving instructions about being careful. Anyway, this "hot dog" creeps back into the bar about an hour later and whispers something about running into the hangar. When Chet came out of shock, we all went down to see how bad it was. This is no place to get stuck; one might be here for days. Little brother got the crate down on the lake in one piece; the only trouble was there was a hangar in the way. That didn't seem to bother him though, he just tried to go through it. The

leading edge of the left wing had a hole in it big enough to throw a St. Bernard into. Now what? "Get out the bailing wire boys, we're not spending the night here". That's just what we did; pulled off a sheet of galvanized tin from the hangar door, bent it around the leading ledge and laced it on with wire. In it's own way; it was the first "Flight of the Phoenix".

After this day, I never saw Chet again, although he kept up a correspondence with my Mother, always curious as to what I was doing. After the war started, he got a job instructing cadets at the Army Air Corps School in Santa Maria.

By now, the flying bug had bitten hard. This was for me, not some boring class in Shakespearean sonnets. On the wall of my room hung a poster advertising the flying cadets; a picture of a dude in a leather helmet and goggles with a wide grin on his face, as much as to say "Man, this is the life". I believed that, I still do! To join the Flying Cadet Corps, completion of two years of college was required, I had that. Perfect physical condition was required, I thought I had that. Since I was under 21, my Mother's permission was required. I didn't have that. I went to work on her right away, and after some reluctance, she gave in and approved. Now came all the preliminaries; three letters of recommendation, some kind of a citizenship check and a physical examination. I took these letters of recommendation seriously. One was from the pastor of our church, Father Francis Mullane. Another was from the principal of my high school, Father Frederick Ralph. With the third letter, I thought I'd really throw in something heavy. A friend of the family was the dance director of Paramount Pictures, Leroy Prinz. Leroy and Major C.C. Moseley were WWI flying buddies in the Lafayette Escadrille in France. Leroy wrote a glowing letter to C.C. asking him to get me into his school. Of course, Moseley had nothing to say about it, but it looked good on paper. The physical examination they gave you those days was something else.

I was a tall skinny kid, 6'1", about 140 pounds. On the appointed day, I showed up at the Glendale Medical facility ready to fly through

this thing. After the first ten minutes, they sent me home. I was three pounds underweight. The examining doctor told me to return the next day but just before I arrive to eat three bananas and a glass of milk. He assured me I would get by this problem.

Eye tests, knee jerks, all was going well until the Doc looked up my nose. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I thought he said "Hold for surgery". What was he talking about? Well, I found out. He went on to explain to me that my nostrils were too narrow and that I would have to go somewhere and have them enlarged surgically. Wow! What the hell is this! What else is wrong? As it turned out nothing. He allowed me to complete the examination with flying colors.

My next move in fighting my way into this man's army was a visit to our family doctor. Frank Garpard, M.D. conducted an office and clinic in Highland Park. I wasted no time getting over there to get this nasty business done. Doc warned me that this was a miserably unpleasant procedure. He couldn't stop talking about how inspiring it was to be making such a great sacrifice for one's country. After it was over, I knew what he was talking about.

After presenting myself to the Army doctors again, I was finally approved. Now all I had to do is sit and wait for orders to report. Then they dropped the other shoe. It was the rule of the day that a person could not hold a commission under the age of 21. I must now wait for a class that would graduate after my twenty first birthday. All this meant a few more months to wait. But it was just waiting, not wondering.

At last! "Report on March 17, 1941 to March Field, California for induction".

Cal-Aero Academy was about six miles south of the town of Ontario, California. It began as a primary flight school in later 1940, and added the basic training with the class of 41F. Classes were designated by the year in which they would graduate and in order by letter. I was assigned to class 41H, the next to last class to graduate in 1941. When the day came to report, Mom and I cranked up the car and

drove to Ontario with about everything I owned crammed into three suitcases in the back seat.

Waiting at the main gate was a welcoming committee of uniformed upper classmen. You weren't allowed to drive into the base, so I parked ten feet from the gate and pulled my bags out of the car. One of these nice upper classmen came over and introduced himself. "I'm Cadet so-and-so. Here, let me help you with these bags". I thought, how nice! How wrong! This guy took one step inside the gate and dropped both bags on the ground and started shouting, "Pick 'em up, on the double, chest out, chin up". I didn't have time to look at Mom's face on the way out, but she must have laughed all the way home.

The military commander of this school was Capt. Robert L., "God is my Copilot", Scott Jr., nicknamed from the celebrated book he was to write some years later about his adventures with the "Flying Tigers" in China. There was also a class mascot, some big dog belonging to "Maj." Moseley, who I was to find out shortly, was being fed by the cadets via a buck or two deduction from our \$75 per month pay. Some appetite!

The class was divided into four companies, A, B, C and D, each company segregated according to altitude, six feet and over in company A and so on down. I drew company A. You roomed with members of your own company and that put me in a suite for four with John Casey, from Pomona, Norm Davidson, from Los Angeles and Bill Rietz from Glendale. Most of the cadets in my class came from California; a few from Texas and Oklahoma made up the rest. Our upper classmen, 41F and G, were mostly Texans and they never let you forget it. After a while, we began to wonder if we were in the Confederate Army or being prepared to fight the second battle of the Alamo.

The routine for "Jackpots", that's what underclassmen were called, began with assembly in the morning, ten minutes after the P.A. blasted reveille with enough decibels to wake the dead. Run to breakfast, run to lunch, run to the flight line, run to dinner and run to bed. One had to wonder if we were being prepared to fly airplanes or enter the mara-

thon in the Olympics. The classroom and the flight line were what this business was all about, and it was all business. The rest of the crap we had to put up with was strictly sophomoric hazing, done for the purpose of converting us into “Officers and Gentlemen”. Hardly a night went by that a contingent of upper classmen didn’t burst into your room, brace everybody and start to play games like “Spin the airplane”, a cute little antic where you held a broom against the ceiling with your nose, and with arms outstretched, began to spin around in a circle until either the broom or you or both fell to the floor, in which case you crashed and were promised all sorts of dire consequences by these inquisitors goading you on. Most of us had put up with this sort of thing before, the frats in college doing far worse things to their pledges than this kind of treatment. We were being indoctrinated into the “pecking order” of the military, R.H.I.P. (rank has it’s privileges). Our is not to question why, ours is but to do or die. Beneath it all, there was a spirit of levity that made all this quite bearable, particularly after you realized you wouldn’t face the firing squad in the morning for failing to perform any of these stunts to the satisfaction of the ‘good ol boys’ in charge of Jackpot indoctrination.

We were organized into groups of four for our flight training. The instructors were a distinguished bunch, all civilians and all with impressive credentials in the flying business. The one that impressed me most had been the personal pilot for Chaing Kai Shek for seven years before in China. To me that was the height of romantic adventure. I didn’t know it at the time, but my instructor was more famous among the flyers of the day, having held the trans-continental speed record, won at the Cleveland Air Races, and had a world-class reputation as a stunt pilot. His name? Al Williams.

What were guys like this doing in a place like this teaching raw recruits the art of staying alive in a primary trainer? This was 1941; the country was just beginning to pull out of the great depression due mostly to the expansion of spending for military preparedness. Flying jobs in the private sector were few and far between, so here they were,

the cream of the crop, doing the only thing these guys would ever do, flying airplanes. Never in a thousand years could the guy in the bank, with a business suit and tie, understand what made these men a 'breed apart'. Love of adventure? Partly. Thrill seekers? Partly. But most of all it's the momentary total control over ones own destiny, to be loosed from the earth by one's self, for one's self, the ultimate freedom.

Al and I got along just fine. Of his four students, I was always last to get my ride. After Al quit his job at the school, about half way through the course, I found out why. In the beginning, you learn to keep an airplane flying straight and level. After mastering that maneuver you progress to making shallow turns to the right and left, and so on. After enduring three hours of that sort of thing with the first three, Al couldn't take any more, so my hour was devoted to instruction in aerobatics; spins, snap rolls, slow rolls, even inverted flight. Because I came in with a private pilot training under my belt, I was excused from the mundane, but that was a secret between Al and me.

Al left Cal-Aero to answer the call for ferry pilots by the R.C.A.F., flying Hudson bombers from the factory in Burbank to England. Many years later, on a reminiscent visit to the air museum in Chino, I viewed his old Gee Bee racer, the one he set the cross-country record in, a tribute to a great flyer.

The day we met our new instructor, we were given a 'progress' ride to see where he would pick up our training. When my turn came he asked me to show him a figure eight, which I proceeded to do all wrong. Next he requested a pylon turn around two ground landmarks and I screwed that up too. "What's the matter with you?" "Well, I don't know what you want. Al never showed me these maneuvers". "Good God, he told me you guys did a lot of stunt flying, but I didn't think you did that much, give me a snap roll". To pass my primary training check flight by one of the Army lieutenants, I spent my remaining time practicing the required maneuvers.

A 'wash out' was the worst thing that could happen to us. An 'unsuitable for pilot training' was a stigma no one wanted pinned on

him. The Base Commander instilled that fear in everyone at the outset, when in front of the whole Company assembled for our welcoming, he barked, “eyes right, look at the man on your right”. “Eyes left, look at the man on your left”. “One of you won’t be here to graduate”. Great odds, given the choice of navigator’s school or separation.

One of the guys in my flight, Tom DeJarnette, ‘DeeJar’ to all of us, was constantly being threatened with a ‘wash ride’, a do or die check by the Army, in or out in thirty minutes. DeeJar was a big, raw-boned sort who just couldn’t get it into his head that you don’t muscle an airplane through it’s maneuvers. A day or two before he was scheduled, finely, for his ‘wash ride’, he asked me (I had the license) to go with him on a practice ride in a private plane. This was against every rule in the book, but to help a buddy, well, O.K. We went out to a local airport, rented a puddle-jumper, and tooled around for an hour. I don’t know how, but it must have helped as he got by his check ride.

Graduation day for class 41F was also a graduation of sorts of us too; we were advanced to basic training. Now, 41G and 41H were the upper classmen and the new boys in 41I had to take their turn as ‘Jack-pots’. It’s always nice when your turn comes to hand out the ‘crap’ and hand it we did! The incoming class was composed mostly of Texans and we surely did get even. On the day they arrived, I saw one brute of a guy braced against a wall, surrounded by the greeting committee, all screaming orders at him at once, tears just streaming down his face. It was pathetic.

Basic training meant a jump into something bigger and faster, a BT 15, the flying sunroom it was unaffectionately called. Vultee Vibrator built it. Aside from familiarization rides in this airplane, most of our air work had advanced to flights away from our home base, cross-country trips, strange field takeoffs and landings and a little formation flying. It was also our indoctrination into the use of a two-way radio.

On a day near the end of our course, the big cross-country trip came up. Our whole class was to take off at two minute intervals, and in trail, fly East through San Gorgonio Pass, over Palm Springs and on

down to Imperial, make a short touch down and return by the same route. Radio silence was a factor; formation flying was a no-no. No sooner had we lost sight of the field, groups of three and four were forming together, totally oblivious to the fact that we were being watched all the time. High above was Lt. Lancaster, Army chief of training, the one guy we were all in awe of. Radio silence was broken. His voice boomed over the air, "I want the names and numbers of everyone in these formations". I piped back on my radio, "Break it up boys, it's the Phantom of San Gorgonio Pass". The name stuck with Lt. Lancaster as long as I heard. We got away with it because no one admitted he was guilty.

We were fast winding down our training at Cal-Aero, the hot summer closing in on our graduation day. My basic Instructor, Mr. Charles McHenry, green lights me to take my final check ride with Lt. Lancaster. If he ever knew it was I who mouthed off during that cross-country flight, I would have flunked on the spot. But all went well, and preparations proceeded for the 'Big day'. A couple of weeks before, we made appointments with the tailor in downtown Ontario to be fitted for our new Army officers uniforms, olive drab jackets and 'pink' pants. Some of the guys went so far as to order a set of formal attire, although, I don't know where the hell they thought they would wear it.

Graduation day was a gala affair. It started off with a parade of cadets, reviewed by Air Marshal Billy Bishop of the R.C.A.F. while our instructors performed a fly-over in formation. During the open house which followed, most of the attention was given to some Hollywood starlet, I believe her name is Joan Lesley. A bunch of 'bird-dogs' was fairly packed around her with every step she took. A lot of good it did 'em, a jolly group of my friend's beat it to the local Ontario pub, much more rewarding. The final graduation event took place that night at the Ontario High School auditorium, where several dignitaries made speeches, the longest of which was delivered by our Commandant, Capt. Scott. He must have been feeling somewhat sentimental, because

shortly after that he quit Cal-Aero and joined up with Claire Chanault and his 'Flying Tigers'.

Goodbye Cal-Aero, hello Stockton. Our whole class was assigned to Stockton Field, an Army advanced training base, and after a few days at home, we were on our way. It was August, 1941 and we were to spend the next three months learning what a retractable landing gear was, and instrument flying and night cross-country, and not to forget the link trainer. The link trainer, I hated that sweatbox with a passion. The move from Cal-Aero to Stockton was like the difference between kindergarten and high school. Oh, there was the usual marching up and down again, and the demerits associated with some kind of misbehavior. Too many of those and you remained on the Base over the weekend. 'Adult entertainment' in the form of a beer garden was offered, so even that wasn't too hard to take. It happened to me once, for what infractions I don't remember. There wasn't much to do off the Base anyway, maybe a trip to the Bunny Hutch in downtown Stockton, a place of dubious reputation that seemed to prosper, mostly due to the patronage by the U.S. Army.

Our living quarters were strictly 'GI'. Gone were the bungalow suites with private baths we enjoyed at the civilian school. Housing was in a two-story barracks building, a design of which was to mushroom up all over the United States in the next year or two. The building accommodated about fifty cadets and all fifty had to use the 'Can' at the same time. This was located at the rear of the ground floor. Lavatories lined one wall; open toilets lined the other. Anyone can imagine this scene during the twenty minutes between reveille and assembly. You couldn't use the restroom at the corner gas station so you just got used to it.

We were assigned beds in alphabetical order, as was our grouping in flights for flight training. Lanphier, Larronde, Launder, Lightner and Lipton. Tom Lanphier came from Idaho. His father was some big shot in Washington, who, we hear had been the commanding general of Selfridge Field in Michigan before he retired. Jim Larronde was from

Los Angeles, the Hollywood section, matriculated at New Mexico State and, like me, swore in on March 17th at March Field. Lightner was the 'Clark Kent' of the Corps, the all America boy politician and Cadet Capt. Of our class. I don't know where Lipton was from, or what ever happened to him after flying school.

The 'scuttlebutt' of the barracks chiefly concerned our future assignments. There were three possibilities, bombers, pursuit, or an overseas assignment. In the case of the bombers and pursuit, you were sent to a tactical unit engaging in these activities and received on the job training in their type of equipment. In the case of the overseas assignment, the hottest rumor around kept pushing Panama as the site. What you would be flying after you got there was anybody's guess. Personally, I didn't really care that much, anything was O.K. with me; there was kind of a twinge of excitement when thinking about Panama, but not overwhelming.

There weren't any washouts in our class. The only one we ever heard of occurred in our upper class 41G. On the other side of the San Joaquin Valley, west of Stockton, United Airline had their flying school. This hotshot in 41G decided life in the airlines was better than what he was carving out for himself, so one day he takes an AT6 full bore down the main street of Stockton just over the street lights. Before the window glass hit the floors, the phone in the Commandants office was jumping off the hook. Needless to say, he got the boot all the way up his rear and incidentally, all the way over to the UA School. Dumb?

The count down to graduation was nearing the end. The uniforms we ordered in Ontario had arrived and we were strutting around in them ten feet high. A few days before the big event, the call came down for 19 volunteers to go to the Philippines for a two-year tour of duty. A bunch of my buddies were all hot for the idea, but I wasn't. Larronde was going, so was Dee Jar, and Johnny Jacobs, Norm Davidson and Hayden. These guys were all volunteers, but it didn't add up to 19, so a few conscripts were added, one of which was Tom Lanphier. As soon as he hears this, he jumped to the telephone and called his 'old man' in

Washington and pleaded for help. It worked. Tom's name was removed from the Philippine roster. In the end it didn't matter much, as we were all to wind up on some 'beautiful' South Pacific island in a few months anyway. To his everlasting credit, Tom made up for that bit of whining, when, in a P38 flight over Bouganville, in the Solomon Islands, he shot down Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Japanese Fleet.

The class was assembled in the Company Street. An officer made an announcement about needing one more volunteer for the Philippines and would someone please step forward? Nobody did. "In that case, we will draw a name out of this hat and the winner goes". Listening to all the prodding I was getting from my friends, I suddenly decided "What the hell" and took a step forward. A huge cheer arose from the ranks.

October 31, 1941, graduation day. My mother and sister drove up for the occasion, kind of a two-pronged celebration, my twenty first birthday being just ten days prior. It wasn't as big a blast as we had at Cal-Aero, just the usual fight talks, then the march through the diploma line culminating in the hat throwing to the shouts of "Hip-hip hooray". One thing for sure, we walked out of there the proudest guys on this planet, trying our best to keep from looking down every minute at those beautiful silver wings pinned on our chest.

2

Welcome to “The Force”

Ten days leave! Los Angeles here I come. Mom, my sister and I drove over to San Francisco to see the sights and visit a few relatives. We did neither. It poured rain the whole time we were there and got further messed up by friends of mine driving up from L.A. to ‘see me off’. Two days of this was enough so we set sail for a warmer clime.

For one week I was ‘king of the mountain’. It was party, party, party. I was accompanied to the Union Station with an entourage of friends and relatives armed with candy, cigarettes, notes, and even a bottle of hooch. The car keys nearly wound up in the Orient, as they were in my pocket when the train was pulling out. Luckily, somebody thought of it, ran into the train and retrieved them just in time.

Hail! Hail! The gang’s all here, in some fleabag hotel on Market Street in San Francisco. In a room for two, there was myself, of course, along with roommates Jim Larronde, Dee Jar, Johnny Jacobs, H.H. Hayden and Norm Davidson. We kind of slept in shifts, somebody was always gone, and somebody was always there. The YWCA was just across the street from our hotel. The view was unobstructed of all the front rooms in the ‘Y’ and it was a simple matter to lean out the window and yell across the street for a date.

We set sail on November 22, 1941. Fort Mason was the place of embarkation down next to Fisherman’s Wharf. An army band and a group of well-wishers were dockside, my aunt and cousins included. The U.S.A.T. ship, Willard A. Holbrook, was dressed from bow to stern with red, white and blue flags and to the strains of some snappy

military marches, slid out into the bay and aimed at the Golden Gate. Little did I know then what I was getting into. Next stop Honolulu!

Our quarters on board were in what used to be the cocktail lounge when the ship sailed the Pacific as the President Taft, a luxury liner of the President Line. We had our own private sun deck high up over the stern with a beautiful view of the wake. This was to be home for the next thirty days, the first five of which was spent in nothing more than anticipation of hula girls and leis. There was little more to do then play bridge and eat.

There were twenty-one of us, two having come from another flying school and one civilian. He worked for RCA and was on his way to Wake Island to set up an advanced radio station. Jim L. bought a portable short-wave radio in San Francisco just before we left, and this guy would sit with us on the verandah translating Morse code as it came over the air in what seemed to be a steady blur. He left us in Hawaii to take a plane on to Wake Island. I guess we all know what happened to him.

On the morning of the fifth day out, the bridge games were interrupted by shouts from topside, "Hawaii, Hawaii". There it was, faintly on the horizon and the adrenaline started to flow. "Prepare yourselves all you hula dollies, here comes the Air Corps".

It was Wednesday November 27th when we docked alongside two Naval vessels, their decks decorated with half naked sailors sunning themselves like seals on a rock. It was late afternoon before they let us off this tub and a long walk down through the naval shipyard to a stand of waiting cabs put us on the beam to Honolulu town. First stop was a bar somewhere where we 'round tabled' over a few planters punches, plotting activities for our layover in Honolulu. Those days, there were two playgrounds in Honolulu, Hotel Street, downtown and Wakiki Beach. Hotel Street was populated by rows of sleazy bars attracting every sailor, beachcomber and high-sees drifter west of San Francisco. The only way to enjoy that atmosphere is in the company with the ship's crew, all of it. We opted for the beach and the high roll-

ers. Wakiki was a long stretch of sand and palms, marred by only two hotels, the Royal Hawaiian and the Ala Moana. No doubt about it, this is where the action is, and we were all here, all but Dee Jar that is, Hotel Street was more to his liking. A long glass-enclosed bar on the West side of the Court overlooked an immense banyon tree spreading out like an umbrella over the dancers swaying to the music of steel guitars. White uniforms were everywhere, naval officers mostly, with a handful of gobs sampling how the 'other half' lives. We left them a little liquor and headed back to the ship.

The next few days were spent alternating between bars and poking around shops. I did get a shave and haircut, the barber being a Japanese girl, as they all were. I often thought about that later, that Jap broad with a razor at my throat. What if...Oh well, the attack wasn't until next Sunday anyway.

Saturday night, our last night in port, we all went to the Hickam Field Officer's Club. This was really the first 'big time' officers' club we had seen and it was impressive. The party was big and everyone was in uniform, this time olive drab was everywhere. The bash wound down in the wee hours of Sunday morning and we made our last trip over to Pearl and our bunks on the Holbrook. The party was over in more ways than one. Next week these guys would be lucky to have a club to hold a party in.

3

It Rained on our Parade

It was Sunday morning, November 30, 1941. The Holbrook weighed anchor at 8:00 A.M. It was our last look at Pearl Harbor and ' Battleship Row ' over the rail of our verandah. Just one week later and this scene would turn into a holocaust. The Cruiser Pensacola trailed us out into the sea where we teamed up with several other ships and formed a convoy. The Republic was the largest ship in the group, a former ocean liner and now a unit of the U.S. Naval Transport Service. It was the flagship of the convoy and contained the convoy commander, Brig. Gen. Julien F. Barnes, along with twenty-seven pilots, most of who were recently Flying Cadets. Our ship carried about 2,000 troops of the 131st Field Artillery and our company of twenty-one pilots. A Col. John Robinson, a brass-hat type who strode the decks snapping a riding crop against his high boots and britches, commanded the 'caissons'. He was later to be involved in one of the most fantastic adventures of the war in the Pacific. Six other ships carried the cargo, the U.S. NT Chaumont, the USAT Meigs, the USN Niagera, the U.S. freighters Admiral Holstead, Coast Farmer and the Floemfontain, a Dutch vessel. We could see some P-40's lashed to the decks of the Meigs but had no idea what else they were carrying. Long after the war was over, the cargo of this convoy was disclosed. We carried 2,600 Air Corps troops, 2,000 other troops, 340 motor vehicles, forty eight 75 mm guns, three and one half million rounds of ammunition, 600 tons of bombs, 6,000 drums of aviation oil, 3,000 drums of aviation gasoline, thirty eight P-40's and fifty two A-24's. Had this reached the

Philippines, the impact certainly would have been felt, not to the extent of changing the course of the war however.

The first few days out of Pearl Harbor, we were on a course of due south, which caused questions around the bridge tables. If we are sailing to the Philippines, why the hell are we going south? About the third day out, the ship's crew went over the side and painted our beautiful white ship gray. What the hell is going on? All of this was forgotten in the festivities of crossing the equator and King Neptune's visit to the ship. The 131st FA ran the party which was raunchy, to say the least, mostly involving garbage, flour, oil or any other nasty thing they could find to smear on a few of their 'friends'. We watched the whole thing from our Falcon's Lair on the top deck.

The next day was Sunday, December 7th; the sea was calm and the weather tropical. As was our custom after breakfast, we were lounging on our veranda, Jim twisting the dials around on his short wave radio. Suddenly it came crackling through, Pearl Harbor was under attack! Strangely, I don't recall any change in attitude on the part of the pilots, probably due to our naiveté. The main topic of conversation centered on where this cruise might end up. We were still sailing south when, on the morning of the 11th, we made our first landfall out of Hawaii, Pago Pago in the Samoan Islands. We got no more than a fleeting glimpse of that South Pacific paradise as we plowed on past, enroute to our first port-o-call, Suva in the Fiji Islands.

For the ensuing forty years, I had the lingering suspicion that the Pearl Harbor attack, although not orchestrated by Washington, was allowed to happen in order to bring the United States into the global war. It seemed that the only logical excuse for sailing south instead of west for the Philippines, was to keep our valuable convoy out of the hands of the Japanese, knowing the attack was imminent. Such was not the case, any more than lining up the B-17's on Clark field in the Philippines so they could be knocked over by the strafing Japs like pins on a bowling alley. It was simply a case of stupidity on the part of 'Command'. Months before P-Day, everyone from the President on

down knew that relations with the Japanese were deteriorating rapidly, yet the military 'brass' continued to do business as usual with little regard to the possibility of a Japanese first strike. Had the minimum prudent precautions been taken with the forces we had, and preserved beyond Day 1, we could have put up one 'hellova' battle. What if, (the biggest words in the English Language) the seven battleships clobbered that day had instead been out on patrol in a task force with the Enterprise and Lexington? Interception of the Japanese force could have ended the war before it got started.

Although Pearl Harbor garnered all the headlines, the attack on the Philippines was just as devastating and just as fouled up from our point of view. Oddly enough, though Admiral Kimmel and General Short were criticized and dismissed from their commands for their rolls in the Hawaiian fiasco, McArthur, the super egotistical 'Little General; turned out to be the number one American hero. He should have been left on Corregidor, but when his "I shall return" crap hit the papers, Washington was stuck with him, after all, he was now God's gift to the American people. What PR! It took a long time, but Harry Truman finally caught up with him on April 11, 1951.

Suva was something right out of a movie set. Tropical South Pacific islands were something we were to see many times in the next year and a half, but this was our first, and it was impressive. The ship docked right at the end of the main street of town, a group of whitewashed wooded buildings laced around an open lush green Mall. A squad of Fiji Islanders, dressed in all white British uniforms topped off by white pith helmets, paced up and down, their rifles at right shoulders and arms swinging British style. How we wanted to get ashore! No such luck. "All personnel will remain on board". So all we could do was lean over the rail and drool. The Holbrook took a big drink and the next morning an Australian corvette showed up to escort us on the last leg of our journey to Brisbane.

4

We're 'Yanks' for the Next Eighteen Months

It was an eight-day run from Suva to Australia, the Brisbane River coming into view the morning of The 23rd of December. Talk about a bunch of eager guys chomping to get off a boat! The trip up that river seemed to never end; every bend just preceded another. It did end of course, just as all things eventually do, and we docked, twenty-three days and four hours after leaving Hawaii.

Lines of trucks were assembled at the end of the quay, operated by Australian army personnel. The Aussie driving the truck I jumped in, when asked where he was taking us replied, "To the rice court". "Where? To the what?, Heh, what is this guy saying?" We didn't find out until we drove up in front of Ascot Racetrack. From a pile, we picked out a set of flat cot springs and a blanket. The idea was to climb into the grandstand and place the cot across the seats, it wasn't exactly level but it would do. We spent one or two nights on this pad and decided to cash it in for a room in the Lennons Hotel downtown. Jim and I had a room on the fourth floor and for awhile the war was a thousand miles away, both literally and figuratively.

Needless to say, our first night out on the town was spent in a Pub on Queen Street, the main drag of Brisbane. The weather was warm and delightful, it being mid-summer down under in Australia. The Pubs and restaurants were brimming with food and drink, there being no shortage of anything in the country. You could buy full bottles of scotch right in the Pubs. We did. We stocked up. There was no short-

age of girls either, half the Australian men were overseas in North Africa doing their thing for democracy. We felt it our duty to fill the gap. It was a warm welcome, indeed, and stayed that way, at least among the tender gender, the 'Diggers' weren't prepared for the 'Americanization' of Australia which was to follow in a few short months. Their noses got a little out of joint after they were outnumbered ten to one. Who can blame them? We cornered all the booze, broods, cigarettes, taxis, hotel rooms and best tables in all the restaurants. All that was left for the 'natives' was a glass of cold beer and that was cold only because the Americans wanted it that way.

The same day we arrived, a Sunderland flying boat landed in the Brisbane River bringing a group of pilots who had been evacuated from the Philippines. These were the 'old' hands that were too valuable to leave behind to rot in a Jap prison camp. Actually, they were members of the 27th Bomb Group whose planes were aboard our convoy. They had visions of flying them back to Luzon and continuing where they left off. Personally, I think they were pleased to find them crated with half the parts missing. Compared to Manila, this place was Paris, not to mention the prospects of longevity. They were to be the nucleus around which to rebuild the 27th Group, Squadron commanders, flight leaders, etc. We were to be the rank and file.

Two fields were set up. Amberly Field and Archer Field, both just on the outskirts of town. They divvied us up into three Squadrons, the 16th, 17th and 91st. I drew the 91st along with Jim, Charley Able, Johnny Jacobs, Walt Haines, Joe Ferguson, Herb Hayden and 'Chief' Alverson. The first job to do was to assemble the A-24's we brought with us. Some of the guys were detailed to the decks to help with the unloading which took the better part of a week, what with the Aussie stevedores having to split for 'tea' several times a day. The 91st was given twenty planes to assemble, which twenty was hard to say, as after the stevedores got through, airplane parts were scattered all over the docks, mostly in unmarked boxes mixed up with food stuff and farm

equipment. Solenoids and trigger motors, necessary for operation of the armament, were totally missing and had to be brought from the States by airplane. How the mechanics at the field put these things together I'll never know, but put them together they did, and fly them we did.

New Year's Eve down under is just like New Year's Eve anywhere else and we were in the thick of it. 'Chief' Alverson, an Oklahoma Indian, who we heard owned a slew of oil wells, decided to throw a party. He rented the whole top floor of the Lennons Hotel, restaurant, nightclub and band. Maybe he figured his money wouldn't do him any more good. It turned into a mob scene. He must have gone down the street inviting everyone within shouting distance. There was a line at the elevator nearly to the front door, and when my turn came I stepped in alone. I didn't come out that way though, I had a knockout of a gal in one hand and a drink someone handed me in the other and I wasn't letting go of either one.

No one had received any pay since leaving the States and the pocket books were getting a little flat. So one day, after we had been there a couple of weeks, a Paymaster deal was set up. Placed in charge was Col. Ennis C. Whitehead of the Adjutant General's Staff. He had a room in the Lennons near ours and so he invited Jim and me along with Johnny Jacobs to be the paymaster detail. The four of us started out in the morning with a ride in an Australian staff car pulling up in front of the local bank at opening time. Our sole protection was an Army 45 each of us had strapped around our waist. We marched out of that bank with four canvas bags containing around one million dollars (in Australian currency), threw the bags on the floor of the back seat and went merrily on our way to pump up the local economy. We had hoped to get rid of all the dough the first day, but each station we visited turned out to be a disorganized mess. The pay records of the GI's were fouled up and it took forever for the pay line to work through. At the end of the day, we had distributed only half of the money and so

had to take it back to the hotel with us. Col. Whitehead was the guy charged with all this so he was going to have to baby-sit the cache overnight. Why he didn't put it in the hotel safe, (Lennons was a modern first class hotel) was his business and he opted for his room instead. The plan was that we were to drop by his room every so often to see that everything was OK. We followed orders and checked on him a couple of times during the early evening. Everything looked 'kosher' except next to him on the nightstand was a big square bottle of Johnny Walker scotch and all the mixings. Each time we came in the juice in the bottle was lower and the night wasn't too far-gone before he was working on number two. Inasmuch as the three of us had some very important matters to attend to, we got on with our own adventures and left our bombed Col. with his half million dollars under the bed next to his. Our detail passed out the rest of the dough the next day without incident.

Major Ed Backus commanded the 91st Squadron to which we were assigned. He was an 'old' airline pilot who was reactivated and found himself in the Philippines. Second in command was Capt. Harry Galusha from Little Rock, Arkansas. 1st Lt. Julius 'Zeke' Summers from Sommeville, Tenn. Was my flight leader and the only West Point graduate in the group. The other flight leader was 1st Lt. J.R. Smith who had just returned from a hair-raising trip in a B-25 to Mindanao and back in an effort to evacuate some more people. The effort was unsuccessful. Three other 2nd Lts. came out of the Philippines with the above, Hambaugh, Salvatore and Tubb. They were in a class or two ahead of the rest of us and had the misfortune to have sailed to the Philippines a month or so before we did. They got there! They lucked out in one respect though, they got out and that's more than most of the others of their class could say, as they wound up as hardened veterans of the Infantry, and if they made it through the Bataan Death March, sat out the war in a Japanese prison camp.

Training was completed by the 1st of February and we were now considered to be prepared to meet the cream of the Imperial Japanese Navy, so a big bash was held that night in the Bellview Hotel, an older place but with a lot of 'down-under flavor, circa 1890 that is. Anybody who was anybody was there. The 27th Group Commander, Col. James 'Call me Uncle Jim', aka Big Jim, Davies, Capt. Floyd 'Buck Rogers', 16th Squadron Commander, Capt. Herman Lowery commanding the 17th Squadron and most of the remaining brass in the Brisbane area. The party went into the wee hours of the morning, and was such a magnet nobody could stay away, including H.H. Hayden who was supposed to remain at the Field as Duty Officer. We learned that he 'expropriated' a truck in which he took himself to the party. For this little 'indiscretion' he was summarily bounced out of the Squadron and transferred to a 'filling station' in the Australian out-back, the going punishment for 'screwing up'. It turned out worse that that for him though, as the Quantas airliner he was riding to his new station crashed and H.H. became the first casualty of our bunch.

5

Let's Get in this War

We were packed up and ready by the 4th of February when the 'go order' came through. The first leg of the trip to Java was a flight across Australia to Darwin on the West coast. In all 1,800 miles. Because the range of our A24's was limited by oil consumption rather than gasoline, the trip was broken up by three stops for service, the first of which was Charleville, 400 miles NW of Brisbane. The Squadron was also broken up into two flights. The first being led by Maj. Backus, on whose wing I flew, and the second being led by Harry Galusha the next day. There was very little room for personal belongings, a small hatch behind the gunner which I stuffed full of cartons of cigarettes. The only clothes we had were on our backs, aside from a change of underwear and socks.

The flight to Charleville was mostly over farmland and quite pleasant as there were things to look at and sights to see, beyond that, however, the terrain took on a threatening appearance. Nothing but scorched ground dotted with enormous ant hills as far as one could see. There was no need to navigate as everyone was following Backus and if he made a mistake we were all cooked. He hit each 'Oasis' on the head, however, and we never were concerned. Charleville, a quaint town of dirt streets and board sidewalks, as were all the towns in the Australian out-back, was sort of Headquarters for all the sheep stations for hundreds of miles around. The 'natives' were friendly and the beer, though warm, was refreshing. After an overnight stay in an antique hotel, we were off again to Cloncurry, 500 miles down the road. Cloncurry was Charleville all over only less. They had on thing Charleville didn't have

though; flies by the millions. By the time we walked from our parked planes to the hangar, the damn things covered us. Some kindly Aussies told us this wasn't bad but from here on the flies get worse. So taking that bit of advise we bought pith helmets and fly nets to tie around our heads. Thank God, 'cause these guys weren't kidding. When we hit Daly Waters the next day, a 600-mile flight, the flies attacked before we stopped rolling. It was unbelievable! After the first bunch hit you, if another wanted to land he would have had to double park. We arrived about lunchtime and accepted the kind invitation of the Aussie garrison to break bread with them. The only structure within sight was their barracks, a wooden shack surrounded by a screened-in porch, to keep the flies out, I presume. Hell, it trapped them in! The lunch was served on a tin plate and consisted of Bully-beef stew with topping. Honest to God, it was so encrusted with flies you couldn't tell what it was until you waved your hand over the plate and then for only a second before the critters settled back down. We just sat there and watched the Aussies lap it up with gusto. Thanking them for their hospitality, it was back into our crates and off on the last hop to Darwin.

Darwin was a small port town on the Timor Sea. I can't imagine why it existed but there it was and it became very important in the weeks to come. It had the appearance of a sleepy little seacoast town that didn't know what was happening to it. We didn't see any civilians. There was plenty of Air Corps though, the Netherlands Indies being the only war we had and Darwin was the crossroads of our world.

Galusha, with the second flight, came in the next day minus the 'Chief'. He cracked up on landing in Charleville and as a result, picked a new spot in the war for himself. Reports of an imminent Jap attack on Darwin scrambled us out of town for a day or two, to a place called Batchelor Field, about thirty miles inland. We sat out the warning there among a tribe of Aboos, the first bushmen we had encountered. This was the field where 'Dugout Doug' McArthur's party of three B-17's landed when they brought him out of the Philippines some month and a half later, on St. Patrick's Day, to be exact.

When orders to head for Java arrived, Backus decided to blaze the trail, taking Charlie Able and J.B. Criswell with him as wingmen. The first leg of the over-water flight was 550 miles to Koepang on the island of Timor and when they came in for a landing the Aussie anti-aircraft gunners opened fire, holing Backus's ship several times with only superficial damage. These guys were itchy fingered to say the least, and an A-24 head-on looks like a Jap Zero so nobody blamed them for taking a little 'target practice'. This similarity in appearance to the Zero saved my hide eleven days later in Bali. The three of them spent the night in Koepang, with Backus taking off for Java the next morning, while sending his two wingmen back to Darwin; why, we never did understand.

Galusha then, was to lead the whole flight to Java but before we could get going, we lost two more members, Jacobs and Salvatore whose planes couldn't make the trip. They also wound up doing time in other outfits.

There isn't much to say about a long over-water flight, you either make it or feed the sharks. Again, navigation was out of our hands; we just sat back and played follow the leader, tightening up our formation each time we flew through a thunderstorm. The mountains of Timor were a welcome sight, and the Bay and runway of Koepang even more so. No one shot at us this time, so we got down in good shape.

6

The Spice Islands—Beautiful but Pathetic

Koepang looked like something out of a South Seas travel folder. With the greenest of mountains in the background, the bay was surrounded by coconut palms on the whitest of beaches. Scattered among the palms, the buildings were all constructed of bamboo and palm fronds with their windows of woven mats propped open with sticks.

It was late afternoon when we arrived, and after a short stop at our quarters to clean up as best we could, we retired to the Officer's Club to greet the permanent party. The structure was elevated on piles, constructed, in the manner of all the rest, of bamboo and fronds. Inside, rattan mats covered the floors and walls; Batik panels waving to and fro from the ceiling, stirring the air gently over the assembled officers. It was at this moment that I realized that we weren't in the hands of the Aussies, these were Englishmen, and this was the RAF. They were immaculate in their all white uniforms laced with gold braid. Never would you suspect they knew they were to end their war in a matter of days at most. We were self-conscious in our dirty clothes and looked more like something that should be sacrificed up to the Japs than these magnificent airmen; and sacrificed they were, one week later when the Japs overran their island. The dinner we were served that night was an unforgettable experience. One long table, which accommodated everyone, was set formally with crystal, silver and china emblazoned with the RAF crest. Candles illuminate the room. In the manner of Indone-

sia, turban-clad natives serving one delicious dish after another surrounded the diners. When the steward, a sergeant in the RAF, completed pouring the wine, the Commanding Officer at the head of the table, arose, glass in hand, and toasted, “Gentlemen, (all rise), the King”. This wasn’t some God forsaken island somewhere at the end of the earth; this was a Hollywood movie set!

At dawn we were gassed up and ready to go. The flight to Java was to be broken into two elements, one group of those who could make the 750 miles non-stop, another group having to make a gas stop in Waingapoe on the island of Soemba. My ship had the range, so I was in the first flight, departing in trail five minutes apart. It was a long grind, ’cause at 165k’s cruising speed, this A-24 wasn’t exactly swift. The trip was without incident and I brought it down on a strip call Pasirian on the South Java coast. One by one we came in, all but Haines that is; he stayed behind in Wainapoe after wrecking his plane by running into a barrier on the runway. We never heard of him again but the best that could have happened to him was to sit it out as a POW.

Pasirian was a mud puddle responsible for miring several of our ships, for which the gunners were unhappy but willing to unmire, while the pilots sat around and drank beer. And what beer! It was called Java Beer, served hot in one liter bottles, and was about twenty percent alcohol. A couple of these things and we were half stoned, particularly my flight leader, Zeke Summers, who admitted later to nearly screwing up the next leg of the flight by not being able to find the field. In his behalf, it was difficult to find, as it was sawed out of a sugar cane field and surfaced with cane mats woven by literally thousands of natives. The place was called Bangsol, a sugar plantation owned and operated by the Dutch and we were to operate out of here for the next few days.

Of the fifteen of us who started this trip, we were now down to eleven, an orphan outfit without mechanics or tools, sitting in the middle of a cane field wondering what was going to happen to us next. Eat-

ing and sleeping is important and that part of it turned out to be the highlight of this expedition. We were driven in to the plantation headquarters and assigned to the Dutch homes for billeting, two to a house. Jim and I drew Mrs. Delden's home, a Dutch lady whose husband was off in some other part of Java doing his thing for the Fatherland, as were most all the men of the village. It was long past dark when Mrs. Delden met us at the door and took us immediately into the dining room where we were served the first of many a wonderful meal cooked up by her number one girl, a Javanese who could put together the best of Dutch and Indonesian cuisine. She was unforgettable! There wasn't much in the way of conversation as Mrs. Delden didn't speak a word of English, so every phrase was by way of sign language and this led to a comical situation a couple of days later. I had been appointed Squadron Adjutant and so was given the Squadron paperwork, what there was of it. We made good use of it when we discovered a lack of toilet paper in our bathroom. That was a mistake, however, as you don't use toilet paper in a Dutch toilet, you wash instead, using some little water-filled bottles and wash rags which are placed along side the bowl and when finished with these you simply throw them on the floor, as you do with everything else you are through with. The toilet itself looked more like a bidet with a shallow bottom and contained no water; consequently paper would clog it up. Well, it was Jim's misfortune to have just used the bathroom when Mrs. Delden appeared on the scene and gestured to him to follow her back into the bathroom whereupon she put on a demonstration in the use of a Dutch toilet. When they came out of there, Jim was as red as a fresh boiled lobster, mumbling something about life's most embarrassing moment, while all I could do was stand there and laugh.

It was a delightful four days we spent in Bangsol, waited on hand and foot by these wonderful people who thought we were White Knights come to rescue them from their fate. How we wished we could have! But orders came to fly on to Batavia, the Capitol and Headquarters at the time, so off we went, each of us with a little memento in his

pocket to remind us of a courageous little group of people, though nearly defenseless, were determined to fight for their homes no matter what the odds.

Batavia was a city teeming with people, most of whom were riding bicycles. They were soon to be joined by Charley Able and J.A. Smith, Able bending his prop taxiing into a barrier and Smith unable to coax another mile out of his worn out machine and both left behind to fend for themselves. That took us down to nine. It went down to eight the next day in Bandoeng where we made a short stop enroute to Malang. It was Criswell this time. He spent his remaining days in Java in the Bandoeng Hotel drinking Heineken's beer, etc. Cris had the distinction of being on the last plane out of Java, several days after everyone else left. It seems that he and two other Artillery officers who shared the room in the hotel, were sitting around cooking up a plan to hijack a fishing boat and try to make it up the coast of Sumatra and on to India, a plan had two chances, slim and none. Left behind on the field at Bandoeng was a shot up B-17 that a civilian ex-airline pilot saw had possibilities. He, and a couple of mechanics, went to work with bailing wire and glue. What parts they needed were scavenged off of other wrecks scattered around the field. The Fortress had no instruments in it at all but the engines ran and that's all that counted. They were to make a night take-off (to avoid the Zeros) and planned to take out twenty passengers. Some guy knocked on the hotel room door and announced that there was room for one more, so Cris and his buddies did the only honorable thing; they flipped a coin for it. Cris won! We always wondered if those other two ever set out on their wild odyssey.

The eight of us flew into Malang, which was to be our base of operations for the remaining time we spent in Java. It was a big field with paved runways, lights, hangars and all the goodies that make a first class base, and it was 'home' to the 19th Bomb Group. Just eleven months ago to the day, I walked on the ramp at March Field and admired these same ships.

It was late afternoon when we bedded down our planes and headed for our quarters, a small bungalow a mile or two from the field. No time was wasted there, however, as we had to get back to the base for a big meeting of the entire Bomber Command, called by General Brereton, C.G.F.E.A.F. (Commanding General, Far East Air Force). Everyone assembled, officers and men alike, in one of the two hangars at Singosari; the Dutch name for the airfield at Malang. Lanterns were hung everywhere, electric lights were forbidden after dark, transforming the scene into something like an oriental garden party. The 91st Bomb Squadron sat somewhat in the back, and between the rain on the roof and our disinterest, didn't hear a word the General said as he read off seventy four citations for bravery in what was the first Air Force decoration ceremony of WWII.

7

The Force Attacks

Our baptism of fire began two days later on the 19th of February when the Japs sailed a convoy into the Lombok Strait and invaded Bali. An afternoon dive-bombing attack on the convoy was planned but before we could get off the ground, Jap zeros hit the field and in the chaos that followed, Gelusha and Summers took off to fly around awhile until the attack was over. Instead, they flew down to Bali and did a little dive-bombing on their own. This event was another first; the first dive bombing in U.S. history. The Army Air Corps beat the Navy at their own game.

The next day was a little more organized. Early in the morning we were bombed up with one 600 pounder and two 100's under our wings. We only had one problem; we had one less airplane. Jim's ship went out of commission and he couldn't go. That left 'The Magnificent Seven' to stem the invasion of Bali. Backus led the squadron and I flew his right wing, Ferguson on the left and Zeke took the slot behind us. Galusha, with Hambaugh and Tubb split off into the second flight. The only briefing for this raid was "follow me". I knew we were going to Bali but that's all. We didn't even have a map. Climbing out of Malang to 14,000 feet we met 16 P-40's of the 17th Pursuit Squadron who were to give us top cover and give it they did, tangling with 30 zeros who came up from Den Pasar to knock us down. As we moved in over the target, the dogfight started above us and we went on without interruption. Down below in the Strait were six warships at anchor, two just offshore and four larger ones lined up side by side a half mile out. From our altitude these ships looked like four matchsticks in the

water, long and thin. Backus gave the signal to switch to an echelon formation and took us over the four cruisers, while Galusa headed his three to the two offshore. No one had any experience at this sort of thing so we devised our own method of attack, namely straight down. The Navy used a 70-degree dive angle, while we reasoned that if you were positioned directly over the target, you couldn't miss. There was plenty to go around, one for each of us. Backus took the first one in line and I took the second, setting the dive flaps and standing the crate on its nose. You pull your goggles off before you dive to prevent your eyeballs from popping out on the way down. Even with the dive brakes, we hit about 500 miles per hour (MPH). The most significant thing I remember about that dive is how that ship lit up of bow to stern, little fires blinking from both sides of the deck. They were shooting back, of course. At that speed you needed about 2,000 feet to pull out but who's looking at an altimeter. I pulled the lever when I thought I had enough room left to pull out before getting wet and that was none to soon. Looking back over my shoulder, we were below the level of the deck. The next order of business was to get the hell out of there. Shells were coming at us from the ships and the shore batteries and I was squirming left and right avoiding geysers of water spouting around me. I thought I had it made when suddenly oil was all over everything; I was hit in an oil line. It's funny what goes through your mind at a moment like this, not panic or fear, just "Oh shit". I knew I wasn't going to nurse this crate back home; it was just a case of how far I could go. I knew one thing, I was keeping in touch with land 'cause shark bait I wasn't going to be. The biggest problem was trying to see ahead with the windshield covered in oil. When I stuck my head out the side, my goggles were immediately oiled shut, so I had to fishtail from side to side to get a glimpse of what was coming. I had gotten out of range of the guns that were firing at us but my engine temperature was going through the roof and we were trailing black smoke. At an altitude of about fifty feet, I crossed over a beach, which for some damn reason, I took for Java. Up and over a little hill, and there it was,

salvation, a beautiful airstrip. I popped the wheels down, pulled the throttle back and, for an instant, sat back and relaxed. I was just about to put the wheels on the ground when a parked zero flashed by on my right side. No mistaking those red suns on the wings. Wow! This wasn't Java. This was Bali and this was no place for me. Not a shot was fired at us as we staggered down the runway in a cloud of smoke. The Japs were as surprised as I was, and by the time they figured out that I wasn't one of their returning zero's, I made it to the beach on the other side and turned up the coast in the direction of Java.

The oil tank was drained dry by this time and the engine was laboring. We were nearing the end of the line for this day. I said something encouraging to Sam in the back seat about ditching this thing in the ocean, and prepared to go in. I popped the dive brakes and hit the water as softly as I could. Not bad at all, I thought. It skipped once, stopped and started to sink like a rock, nose first. The water was up to my shoulders by the time I freed myself from my harness and scrambled out of the cockpit. The tail section was out of the water and Sam was in it out cold, his head having smacked the radio set in front of him. I reached in and unbuckled his seat belt, and as the tail sunk, it was not difficult to pull him out. We were about one hundred yards from shore and I had to drag Sam half the way before he came to. He made it the rest of the way on his own. We had one parachute with us, Sam's, as I couldn't get him out of that. In the seats of the chutes there was supposed to be a survival kit. "Supposed to be" takes on added meaning, as that was what was in it, nothing. Since Sam was the 'gunner', he had the only gun, a 45 automatic that just took a long ride underwater.

We sat on the beach for a short while, rejoicing in terra firma and speculating on how much of this island the Japs have had time to overrun. I figured we were about fifteen miles up the coast from the Jap base at Den Passar and that's not far enough. We couldn't sit here for the duration so we had no choice but to walk out into the open and take our chances. There was no doubt in my mind that the Japs would

be looking for us. They had to know we weren't going very far, the way we smoked up their airport and if my estimate of the situation was correct, we had about sixty miles of Jap infested island to sneak across. I was so damn happy to get down alive that I never for one moment doubted that we would make it.

Scrambling up a hill behind the beach, we surveyed a rice paddy in front of us. In the middle of it was a native with a hoe. He hooked up, dropped the hoe and ran away from us, not a good sign. On the other hand, the sight of us was enough to scare anybody. We hoped he was more scared of the Japs that he was of us.

We sloshed across the rice paddy to a road leading inland from the beach. A short distance up the road, we encountered an old man and a boy, who right off the bat, showed they were friendly. Thank God, things were looking up. With a lot of arm waving and a little pigeon English we learned that the village at the end of this road was called Tabanan and that the Japs were not there yet, although a patrol had gone through earlier. It's surprising how you can communicate when you have to.

On the outskirts of the village we were met by a large assemblage of the local natives, and they were all smiling, a very encouraging sign. Leading us into a Balinese temple, an open-air plot of ground studded with stone idols and monuments, gave the appearance of a graveyard more than a place of worship. We were made to understand that we were to wait there until the village headman arrived which seemed to be a reasonable request, so we obliged. The kid who we met on the road asked if there was anything we would like. Remarking in a manner to lighten the situation, I asked for a couple of beers, never dreaming the kid would go streaking down the road and return twenty minutes later with two hot bottles of the local brew. We drank it with smiles.

Word came that the Village council was ready to receive us and we were ushered up to "city hall", a grass shack in the middle town. Seated around a low table, a dozen old men colorfully garbed in their batiks

and turbans, offered us a cup of tea while they all jabbered at once to each other. You had to wonder if they were debating the merits of turning us over to the Japs for the “reward”. We made them understand that we would like to be furnished with a couple of bicycles; about the only thing they could do for us. When that request hit a flat note, I decided we had better be on our way and fast. The village at the other end of the island facing Java was called Gilimanuk and that was our target as we started out walking down the road.

It’s about sixty miles from Tabanan to Gilimanuk and the road between mostly parallels the south coast of Bali. The first half is fairly flat and winds its way back into dense vegetation from time to time, crossing countless streams graced by bare-breasted native girls bathing and doing their wash. Too bad we were in such a hurry!

By nightfall this had been one hellova long day, so we picked out a grassy knoll to stretch out on and slept like babies till dawn caressed our faces. Mile after mile we trudged up the road, passing through village after village. I don’t think they have jungle drums in Bali but the word got around, somehow, that we were on our way, and a little group of native well wishers were assembled to greet us at each village. As the day wore on our thirst intensified, but I had been so indoctrinated with the dangers of drinking un-chlorinated water in these parts that we passed stream after stream with our tongues hanging out. About mid-day our feet were so swollen inside our shoes, we decided to stop and bathe them in the ocean. It helped some but there was a long way to go yet and the road was becoming hilly.

We stopped at a little roadside hut, a Balinese version of a hot dog stand. Alongside, propped against a tree, two touring natives had parked their bicycles. The last we saw of these two guys, they were standing in the middle of the road frantically waving their arms and shouting as we rod off down the road, *Cest la guerre!*

Gilimanuk at last! A bustling little fishing village on the Bali Strait, and seven miles from home. We parked the bikes and tried to make

somebody understand that they belonged to two guys fifteen miles back. I don't think we got the message across.

In our best sign language, we started looking for a boat to get us back to Java, but no way were we going to get a free ride; the price was fifty guilders or no deal. That's fifty guilders more than we had between us. After all, I didn't expect to have to fork out carfare to come home. Sam and I eased out of the crowd just in case someone could understand English, and decided to take our chances convincing these guys with the 45. Our luck was still holding out, thank God, and it didn't come to that, as at just that moment a big car drove into the village and out steps the Burgomaster, all 300 pounds of him wrapped in batik. He had heard we were there and came to offer his help. What a relief! He could even speak a little English, enough to tell us to go down to a hut on the beach and await a boat to take us across when the sun sets. After eating a dish of scrambled eggs the Burgomaster had sent we immediately fell asleep, just like we didn't have a care in the world. At 7:00 p.m. we were awakened to begin our journey at sea. The beach was crowded with natives, all smiling and waiving. What clout the Burgomaster had! The boat was an out-rigger canoe with a native perched fore and aft. We were to sit in the middle and were given coolie hats to make us look like native fishermen. There was even music for the first couple of hours, the Moslem in the back wailing his prayers to Mecca, invoking Allah for a safe crossing.

This long, wet, miserable trip came to an end at 7:00 a.m., twelve hours in this hacked out log to make seven miles, and they say the Polynesians crossed the Pacific in these things. I don't see how they made it. The Java beach was deserted when we splashed ashore, but it wasn't long before a squad of Dutch soldiers, with rifles pointed at us, appeared out of nowhere and escorted us up the beach to the Dutch command post. The officers were cordial but a little suspicious too as they knew nothing of our bombing mission off Bali. Two oil soaked aviators wading ashore from a native outrigger provoked an air of caution indeed. After a short while we satisfied these people that we were

who we said we were and the situation lightened up. They gave us a change of clothes, civilian pants and shirts, and treated us to a very welcome breakfast. A couple of times, while we were waiting for something to happen, the air raid siren went off. Never before or after, including the London blitz, had I seen such a panic rush to the shelter as these guys put on. They had wads of cotton stuffed in their ears two steps out of the door, the rest of the run was in dead silence. They had to believe the Japs were going to blow Java out of the water like Krakatoa.

In the early afternoon we were driven to the local train station, handed tickets, put aboard the "Toonerville Trolley" and ordered to report to Dutch headquarters in Surabaya. The ride took the rest of the afternoon. Surabaya is a port city on the northeast coast of Java, and temporarily, home of the U.S. Asiatic fleet. I had been in and out of the place a couple of times and had a vague idea of my way around, so I was heading to the first familiar place that had a phone, Dutch Headquarters be damned. That place was the Oranje Hotel and bar. The day was turning to night when we ambled into the hotel lounge looking for a phone to call "home". A screech shrilled across the room, sounding something like "Over here". It came from Zeke Summers, my flight commander, bombed to the eyebrows, having given up sobriety through the long day while waiting for the two of us. We weren't told, but the Dutch had checked us out by phone to our command that morning and informed them that we were being sent to Dutch Headquarters in Surabaya for interrogation. Zeke figured I'd do no such thing and headed the staff car straight for the Oranje. He figured right, and here we were. Between the next couple of Heinekens, Zeke unfolded the story of our raid on Bali. He put me on cloud nine when he said my bomb blew the bow off the cruiser I dove on. Suddenly this whole mess seemed worthwhile. The B-17's who flew over the scene later reported one cruiser towing one destroyer and one destroyer towing one cruiser. There were six before we started on 'em, so there must

be two lying on the bottom. There was a price though. Lt. Tubb went straight in, never pulled out of his dive.

8

The Bugler Blew Retreat

The drive back to Malang was a hair-raiser. Zeke had the Buick, the squadron staff car. The headlights on this crate were painted out; the custom of the day everywhere those days, although I never heard of any Jap strafing attacks taking place at midnight. Well, as I said, Zeke's tank was pretty full of Heineken's by this time, so the Buick was acting more like a tank, plowing through a sugarcane field, crossing the road to get to the cane field on the other side. Sam and I had been through enough to this point. I really did want to get home, so, "Zeke, let me drive the rest of the way". No argument from Zeke, in moments he was asleep in the back seat.

Ed Bacus, the squadron commander, met us in Malang and took us to a restaurant for a meal, and then on to the Base at Singusari, where after some backslapping and howling, I collected my meager belongings, like socks and cigarettes, which the gang gave up, not reluctantly.

We spent a few days preparing our tired A-24's for the coming invasion. We didn't have long to wait. Our base at Malang had been evacuated by the 19th Bomb group a few days before, and we had three A-24's flyable to stem the invasion of Java.

The Jap invasion fleet was sighted on February 27th, coming from the North across the Java Sea. A handful of our B-17's engaged them with minimal damage. They made one raid and headed for the barn. Then it was our turn, all three of us. Galusha, Summers and Ferguson.

I didn't get to go on this; remember my plane was under the Indian Ocean off the island of Bali. I did, however, get to be the Commander of the whole airbase for a couple of hours while Harry and Zeke were

out representing the U.S.A. in the Battle of Java Sea. I sat in Col. Eubanks chair, smoking a cigar I found in one of the care packages from home piled in one corner of the room. I opened several of them, as these guys weren't coming back. There were cookies, candy and a box of cigars. I was answering the telephone. The calls were coming in bang-bang from people at home in the States wanting to talk to their warriors. I really was surprised; half way around the world, the island about to be overrun, and I was talking to some guy's wife in Peoria who thought she was talking the Air Base commander. Well, she was! For a short time this shavetail WAS the Base Commander, (move over Eubanks!)

When the three birds came home to roost, they described to us the amazing sight they beheld while flying over the battle at 10,000 feet.

The fleet steamed out of Soerabaja, homeport for the Asiatic fleet at the time, and under the command of a Dutch Admiral Doorman. No one will say that Doorman was solely responsible for this catastrophe, but who is to blame for leaving the cruiser's scout planes in port and going into battle "blind", so to speak. The USS Houston and the HMS Marblehead didn't have a chance.

Today, our Country is very sensitive about placing our forces under foreign command, and rightly so. We have learned the hard way more than once, "A Bridge Too Far" comes to mind.

The loss of the Allied Navy sealed the fate of Java, though it was really sealed on December 7th, three months ago.

On March 1st, Galusha, who had assumed command of the squadron on Baccus' departure to India a few days earlier, decided to "retreat" to Jogiakarta, the evacuation point for all Allied Forces in Java. Zeke and I were designated to fly the two remaining planes, while the others took the Buick and the roads to Jogiakarta, a couple of hundred miles down the South coast of the island.

About mid-morning, Zeke and I put our planes down on the runway, taxied up to the ramp, handed our keys to the valet service and sauntered in to Operations. The place was a madhouse; guys in all

kinds of uniforms imaginable, all talking at once. If the Japs had walked in the door I don't believe anybody would have noticed.

Zeke spotted Col. Eubanks across the room, made his way over and explained our presence there. The Colonel responded, "Zeke! Glad to see you. I forgot about you guys back there, I'll get you out of here on something today".

Late in the afternoon of March 1st, the Buick with the rest of the squadron pulled in and the wait for a ride to Australia began. B-17's and LB-30's of the 19th and 7th Groups were doing most of the evacuation flights. For the last few days they were making shuttle runs to Broome, a fishing village on the West edge of the continent of Australia.

A bit before midnight, our turn came. We wedged our way into an LB-30 and were on our way out of Java. The last scheduled plane out left thirty minutes later. After that, there were a few hair-raising tales of heroic efforts bordering on the unbelievable. As for our flight, it was quite uneventful. We were thankful this was a night trip. We hadn't heard of any Jap night fighters; had there been any, this would have been a flying coffin.

The war in Java ceased at midnight that March 1st when the last of the organized American forces left Jogjakarta for Australia. From here on it was an occupation by the Japanese.

When I reflect on how this campaign was conducted, and that of the Philippine Islands, it brings to mind events in wars that could best be categorized as "too little, too late", and that can be laid at the feet of Management. In Java, who was to blame for sending such a pitifully few men and machines to block the Japanese advance through Indonesia when it was painfully obvious that this advance could not be stopped at this time, a time when these forces could be used to bolster the Allied force in Australia for a later showdown with Nippon.

Some would argue that it was necessary to sacrifice a few to slow the Jap advance into Indonesia and prevent their capture of the rich oil fields of the region. That argument would stand if we could have done

just that, but our efforts accounted for little more than killing a few people, sinking a few ships, which they never missed, and slowing down nothing; all of this at a cost of men and machines which we sorely missed.

In the Philippines, MacArthur refused to order the B-17's to attack Formosa until the Island itself was fired upon first, thereby creating an act of war upon the United States. What in God's name did he consider the attack of Pearl Harbor some eight hours prior! Was that not an overt act of war, which any patriotic American would have applauded an immediate responsive blow to Japan. So, while waiting for this "overt act" most of our air force was wiped out on the ground, and we lost the opportunity to inflict serious damage on the air and naval forces of Japan during its invasion of the Philippines.

On January 2, 1942, all American, British, Dutch and Australian forces were united under one command. British Gen. Sir Archibald Wavell headed ABDACOM. An American air officer, Major Gen. George Brett was second in command. The ABDACOM was a confused lot. American Gen. Brett pleaded with Washington to give Java to the Japs and reinforce the CBI (China-Burma-India). This fractured Command could never pull together; too many individual national interests at stake, and the direction of the war at that time was being run "by committee", which has the kiss of death on it. On March 2, 1942 the Java campaign was over. We lost it! The Japs got their oil, the Dutch lost everything they had, never to get it back again and the British were never seen again in the Southwest Pacific.

9

Let's Get the Hell Out of Here!

The sun was shining brightly when we landed on a makeshift strip above the bay at Broome. Dawn was an hour behind us, and it was already stifling, and we were but half way to Perth. The “permanent party”, three officers from the 19th Group at Malang who were sent here a week prior to set up provisions for the evacuated that were to come, served us a welcome breakfast. To their everlasting credit, I don't know how they did it. To come here a few days in advance with nothing, and set up food and shelter for hundreds by scrounging the town was an incredible feat.

“Town”, to call this a town is a joke, a few wood and tin shanties beside a couple of dusty streets. The town did have one thing though, and that, I guess is what made it a town, a Pub! Kind of reminded me of the Franciscan Missions in early California. Missions were placed a day's ride apart so that no Christian or Indian had to miss his evening services. The Aussies had a similar system; no beers farther than a day's ride, but the services at the end were quite different. I've been in a few that were downright uncivilized.

If you could call it a town before March 3rd, all semblance of one disappeared after that. At 10 o'clock that morning, it was paid a visit by nine Zero's bent on total destruction. Hannibal and his elephants couldn't have done a better job. Of the fifteen flying boats floating on the bay preparing to take off, all were shot up and burned. The planes up on the runway, 2 B-17's, a couple of Dutch DC-3's, and an LB-30 which was just taking off; all were destroyed. Since the Jap pilots dis-

patched all the military targets, there was nothing left but civilians running for the hills behind the town. Not many made it!

We missed this by 24 hours, as we were in the air on our way to Perth, a thousand miles away. A city that made you wonder if it's real name wasn't "The Garden of Allah", such was the profusion of flowers everywhere you looked; in the parks, on the sidewalks, in the windows, wherever a dash of color would please the eye. We didn't have time to "smell the flowers along the way" though, as in a day or two we were taken to an Aussie training camp 60 miles north on the way to nowhere, where we languished for three weeks while waiting for the High Command to get it's act together.

The beginning of organization taking hold, started with General MacArthur landing in Australia on March 17, 1942, at a field near Darwin on the northwest coast, a place the Japs beat up unmercifully just two weeks before. While we were drinking gin 'n squash and parading around the dinner table led by the Aussie Sergeant-Major blowing a bagpipe and bellowing "Waltzing Matilda", MacArthur was putting his Command back in working order. Headquarters by then had been established in Melbourne, a city that was, then at least, "very British don't you know".

The 91st Gang, that's what I'll call us, never got to participate in the "Battle of Melbourne" because we weren't there long enough; just to get to Headquarters, get decorated, General George pinned a Silver Star on my blouse, and get to the train station for a long ride to Charters Towers in Queensland, our new home for the duration over here. To explain that "Battle of Melbourne" remark, the word got around the world in less than 24 hours, that the returning troops from Java were being met with such overwhelming enthusiasm that all other GI's worldwide, were green with envy.

10

A New Name—A New Home

The long ride up the east coast of Australia was slow and uneventful; about the same distance as San Diego to Seattle. The train would remind you of something out of the time of the civil war, so there were no particular comforts here. Trucks met us at Townsville and gave us a dusty ride to our new home, Charters Towers.

The airdrome was an RAAF base before the war, training pilots for their Country. Like everything else there those days, austerity was the word. There were no buildings for either work or play, so everything was done under canvas. Which brings us to the Officer's Club.

The first provision in any move by the force is the construction of the Officer's Club. In this case, we rented a small house in the town, scrounged some furniture including a pool table and a craps table, named the place and hung a sign over the door, proclaiming it to be the "3rd Slug House". I have no idea who chose this name. It mattered little anyway. Since this watering hole was dedicated to the unwinding of the Group's pilots after a hard day's work in the air, nothing was said about the several inebriates who made a ritual out of passing out with regularity. Those who were still standing would dump them into a command car and taxi 'em back to the base.

Don't get the idea this Group was a collection of drunks; it was far from that. There were a few guys that fit that description, one of my tent mates being one of them, but without exception they were bright eyed and ready to go in the morning. We ordinary mortals always wondered how they did it. My described tent mate for example, was regarded as the hottest pilot in the Group.

The Group commander, Col. Jim “call me Uncle Jim” Davies, ordered a camp set up 20 miles out in the bush. It was labeled the “Duck Club”, where imbibers were sent for a week or so to dry out, so to speak. There was plenty of ducks but no booze. Jim and I both made the team, as did a whole lot of others. It really was kind of nice. There were horses to ride, ducks to shoot and kangaroos to hunt led by an Aboo who could smell a roo a mile away. Anyway, the camp worked pretty well. It served notice to shape up “cause that’s the only warning you were going to get.

On the base, in our tent area, we put up a tent, plowed a little garden in front, and put up a sign saying “Wagonwheel”. It was the 8th Squadron Hangout, complete with record player fueled by the latest releases from home that arrived in care packages. I well remember one we wore out, Harry James playing Sleepy Lagoon, and because Jim L. favored that one, someone, I think it was Zeke, hung the nickname on Jim; Sleepy! From that time on, he could have signed his letters “Sleepy”. Who named the Wagonwheel: I take credit for that. The Wagonwheel was a coffee, etc. shop on the campus at my ex-school, University of Southern California (USC). Many an hour I spent in that place slurping cherry cokes.

Back in the Saddle Again

We didn't have very long to get acquainted with Charters Towers. New Guinea and the Japs were waiting for us at Port Moresby, Papua, and we were going to oblige them. The A-24's remaining in Australia were rounded up and supplied to the 8th Squadron, not more than a dozen. The squadron commander, Major Floyd "Buck" Rogers, led us in a loose formation to an airfield near Port Moresby called 3 mile, being 3 miles from town as the crow flies. The only other airfield in the area was 7 mile, named for the same reason. It was home to the RAAF fighter group flying P-40's. The 22nd Bomb Group, flying B-26 Marauders, and the 19th Bomb Group with their

B-17's used 7 mile as a staging base from which they conducted long range attacks against Jap shipping.

3 mile was in a little valley opening up to the beach. Installations on the field consisted of an operations shack and an RAAF radio facility, manned by the Aussies. The quarters assigned the pilots and gunners was an abandoned mission school called Koki Quarters. We hardly said hello to the place when we were assembled in the Headquarters room, pilots seated in front, gunners and other personnel behind. Buck Rogers stood in front, and in a grim manner, informed us that a Jap fleet was on the way to take our cozy little spot and there was no one to stop them but us. He spoke like a football coach trying to pump up the team when he said the crews would attack repeatedly until we had nothing left. The squadron Doctor, Capt. Baumhower, and his boys were to take to the hills and see if they could work their way home as

best they could. This was some pep talk to listen to. It sounded more like a death sentence. As I recall, it was kinda silent for all the rest of the night. We took our parachutes and went to the operations shack to await the order to take off, which was to come when the Jap invasion force came within our range. This was in early May, and we had not heard of the U.S. Navy in any kind of force since Pearl Harbor and the defeat of the Allied naval forces in the Java Sea. So who was to defend us? Nobody!

I really don't remember everyone who was sitting on the porch that night, probably because we can dismiss from memory most unpleasant things, but we were all there to a man, waiting for the bell to ring. It never did! About a little after dawn, Jim and George Farr strolled over to the Aussie radio room to get a cup of coffee. They walked in on the operator exchanging messages with our ships in the Coral Sea, whose aircraft were at that moment engaging the enemy. Our sentence was lifted!

After the threat by sea had waned, we used the A-24's to fly missions out of Moresby. We just struck at anything that moved and some things that didn't. We didn't suffer much, except from the mosquitos, but that tranquility came to an end in July. The Japs invaded Buna, a location on the north side of Papua. The A-24's were called into action. Buck led all available planes, seven, I believe, for a dive-bombing attack on the landing forces. They didn't have a chance. They were flying under a cloud cover, but the accompanying P-39's who were to provide protection from Zeros, were flying above it and didn't see the Zeros attack our group. All but one of our guys were shot down, including Buck Rogers, who was last seen with two Zeros chasing him around in a circle. John Hill was the only survivor and his gunner was badly wounded. The only reason I am writing this story today is because Jim and I were on leave in Brisbane at the time.

It was during this time, after the battle of the Coral Sea, that our squadron returned to New Guinea to see what damage we might do to the Japanese still there in Lae and Salamoua. We flew into the 7 mile

strip to greet the first fighter replacements for the poor, beat up RAAF, P-40 Squadron that had little left after fighting the Japs alone here since the beginning.

It was a great afternoon when the 39th Fighter Squadron arrived. When the guys climbed out of the cockpits, we saw they were mostly all our old classmates from flying school. Here was John Casey, my roommate at Cal Aero, Jeff Hooker and Hal Hoover, fraternity brothers from USC. Leading this bunch of neophytes was an ace from the Philippines, Lt. Boyd “Buzz” Wagner.

The celebration didn’t last long, just that night in a tent on the flight line. Wagner called for a mission the next morning at dawn, a strike against the Jap stronghold at Lae. Our guys were crucified. It was like what happened to us a short time later over Buna. This squadron had one or two ‘experienced’ pilots, the rest were like us, just able to get the airplane on and off the ground, most of the time, but prepared to meet the cream of the Japanese Imperial Navy, in aerial combat, no way! These Jap pilots had been flying for years in Manchuria, China, some probably against the AVG (Flying Tigers), the attack on Pearl Harbor, and recently from Java, like Saburo Sakai, top ace in the Japanese Navy. Is it any surprise that almost the whole squadron was shot down. It was said that Wagner got two kills that day, but that was no trade-off for all those friends of mine including Casey, Hook and Hal Hoover.

In a great work by author Walter Edmonds, chronicling the early days of the war in the pacific, he title it “They fought what they had”. Nothing was closer to the truth. What we had was some worn out junk left over from some war games played in Georgia and Louisiana, a year or two earlier, there wasn’t a first line airplane worthy of the name in our arsenal.

The airplane given the group, was the P-39 Bell Aircobra; a tricycle landing geared, in-line engine, fighter, designed to be the ‘last word’ in the air. It turned out to be a colossal flop. The ‘bright idea’ was a cannon firing through the pilot’s legs and out the prop hub. It jammed

frequently, and despite modifications, never did work satisfactorily. It was never in the race with the Jap Zero. It was shot to pieces. After our bitter experience, we gave it to the Russians, who put it to good use against Nazi tanks. They must have gotten the bugs out of the cannon.

This raid left a sad legacy. The word got around fast, to the remaining squadrons in Australia, that the P-39 was a flying coffin if you happen to find yourself in one facing a Zero or two. The Japs would strafe our airfield once every morning, just for the fun of it, I guess, as there wasn't anything much there to hit. They would come in off the ocean, low, and fly down the runway 30 feet in the air, do a slow roll or two, all this amid a hail of machinegun fire, and climb out of there as if to laugh at us. These guys were good!

After that first P-39 squadron got knocked out, one or two others from Australia were brought up to New Guinea. Their job was to take on these aforementioned Japs and put an end to these daily 'flying lessons'. That didn't happen! The peashooters took to the air each morning before the show started. The only trouble was, they didn't engage, instead, they flew out to sea a few miles and waited until the raid was over. Everyone knew what they were doing, and they soon got the name hung on them, "The Moresby Fishermen". One day, one of their guys landed at our 3-mile strip, right in the middle of one of these alerts. He no more than set foot on the ground, than Buck Rogers had his pearl handled pistol pointed at this guys head, and yelled at him to get back in that plane and into the air NOW, or he'll blow his head off. Such were the conditions in the Air Force in May/June, '42. We needed new airplanes and a ton more experience.

12

There's Light at the end of the Tunnel

We, more often than not, get the experience the hard way. We did that shortly after returning to Charters Towers from New Guinea. One day, we were practicing low level (treetop) formation flying. The entire squadron was involved, about 12 A-24s. When finished tooling around the countryside for an hour or more, we headed home, switching from a V formation to a trailing one, in which we are strung out in line, one behind the other like a string of elephants in the circus. Circling the field, we come in to land one at a time. I was in the middle of this string, and when it came my turn to land I could see smoke billowing up from the far end of the runway. It went through my mind immediately, "Who was back there?" I knew Jim was in the last element, but wasn't sure who else. As it turned out, it was the last two planes had crashed, after one cut the others' tail off. It was Jim and Norm Davidson, another one of my roommates back in Cal-Aero primary school. Norm had just come off being grounded for a month or two after a minor accident, and Harry Galusha, the CO then, put him last in the formation where he would have an easies time of it. But he just wasn't ready for this tough kind of flying, and in the crossover into the trail, he lost control for a moment, and chewed Jim's tail off with the propeller, coming within inches of Jim's gunner in the rear seat. Jim and the two gunners canopies were open, Norm's was not. We were flying at about 500 feet when this happened, so there was precious little time to escape disaster. But escape it, three of them did.

How, they couldn't tell you. Jim told me, he didn't know what happened. Suddenly the stick went limp, and he was thrown up against the side of the cockpit. Next thing he knew he was floating to earth in his chute. Norm, of course couldn't get out with the canopy closed, so we lost another dear friend and compatriot.

At last! Some new aircraft show up. We are to be reequipped with the Douglas A-20, a twin-engine single pilot, tricycle landing gear, and a 'hot' airplane by most describers of the day. It was built for the British and called the Havoc. A fine airplane to be sure, it was designed for bombing, but we changed that, putting machine guns in that nose compartment, and attaching two more on each side of the forward fuselage, a rear gunner faced back with twin 30 cal. guns. It was a nice piece of equipment, and who deserved it more, after flying the hand-me-downs from the Navy. Now all we had to do was learn how to fly it. Don't take that lightly. The older guys, Harry, Zeke, Hambaugh, and a few more that came out of the Philippines, had flown this ship before, back in the States, So there was nothing new for them, but us, the shave tails of the Group, that's a different matter. To fly this thing for the first time, you were going to do it all by your lonesome.

The first thing we were told to do, was to sit in the cockpit, with the tech manual in our lap, and get familiar with all the bells and whistles that make this baby go. I did that, and after about an hour, I thought I knew where everything was; I was wrong, but I'll get to that later. The next thing in the order of checkout was an indoctrination ride with one of the older guys. Harry Galusha gave me mine. While I sat in the nose, the bombardier's seat, "Galush" tooled around the countryside, at treetop level, skimming the tops of trees. There was a round observation glass behind my head, which on the other side was on the floor between Harry's feet on the rudder pedals. I turned around and looked up there once; a second look I didn't want to take. Harry had his head down tuning a radio for some good music. I'll never forget the song he tuned in; Paul Robsen singing "Old Man River". This guy was the

'coolest' pilot in the whole Air Force, possibly second only to Jimmy Doolittle.

The next part of our training was the 'moment of truth', take it off! That part went smoothly enough, an easy take off and landing followed by several more around the strip. At the end of this day, we were considered full-fledged A-20 combat pilots; such was the way things had to be done those early days of the war. It was 'on the job training' in a big way.

On the third day of this training period, I was sent out to the bombing range several miles from the Base, for the purpose of familiarization with dropping bombs on a target from a low-level attack. I was accompanied by Zeke's gunner' Sgt. Simpson, who minded the guns in the rear while I buzzed through the bombing exercises. Time to come home, so I relaxed a bit and looked my instruments over. Lo-and-behold I lost all hydraulic pressure. That meant no wheels, no flaps, and no breaks. Wow! Now what! Well the 'now what' is you get it down the best way you know how. I had help from the ground; thank the system, as soon as I informed Ops. of my emergency, the whole Group was at the side of the runway in minutes, fire trucks and all. Harry got on the other end of the phone and told me to fly around the field in circles and use up most of the fuel I had in the tanks, and while doing so, crank the wheels down manually. Fine, except I couldn't find the crank handle, being one of the things I overlooked while sitting in the cockpit the other day.

Never fear! Harry to the rescue! He coached me to put my hand behind me and grab the handle, then place it in the crank slot, and grind the wheels down. Great! We did that, we're home free. Not quite! I got the two main wheels down but the nose wheel was swinging free. With instructions from my mentor on the ground, I pulled the nose of the plane up sharply, and then slapped it down hard, forcing the nose gear to swing forward, hoping it would get into the locked position. Many times doing that was unsuccessful, so I asked Simpson if he wanted to bail out, as it appeared I was headed for a crash landing.

Simpson replied “No way Lieutenant “I’m sticking with you”. That was a big confidence builder. I attempted to get the nose wheel locked in place right up to the approach to my landing. Realizing there were no brakes, I dragged the ship in as slow as possible. The main gear touched down just feet from the beginning of the 6000 ft runway. On the sidelines down there, the whole 3rd Bomb Group was assembled, jeeps, trucks, fire and emergency equipment, all waiting to jump on the wreck. But it didn’t happen! I fully expected the nose to fall over and take a big bite out of the asphalt, but it didn’t happen! For some reason I have never been able to explain, in those last few seconds the loose gear decided to lock, and we stood upright. OK, so now all we have to do is stop this thing. There is no reasonable substitute for brakes. We taxi multi-engine aircraft using engines, brakes or both, so that leaves me with engines only to steer this airplane to a successful stop. Coasting straight ahead was out of the question because this beautiful 6000 ft strip ended overlooking a ravine 20 feet deep. I threw open the canopy and rolled on down the runway, leading a parade of people and cars that I wasn’t even aware of. I expected the fire trucks to follow me, but the whole Group, ‘Uncle Jim’ Davies, the 3rd Group CO included, I did not expect. Near the end of the runway, and just before you would tumble into the ditch, I had to steer this ship into a taxiway, and continue rolling using the engines in place of brakes. A half-mile down this lane, I ended up in a farmer’s field, up against a tree, which put a final punctuation on my roll. I was encircled by the mob, and the first guy there was Galush, Who said, “Look what you did to my wing” pointing to a small dent in the leading edge of the wing that hit the tree. I was flying Harry’s airplane.

The next few weeks we spent flying out of New Guinea, attached to the 89th Squadron. They were being used as the operational arm of the Group. The job was bombing and strafing the Kokoda Trail, the route the Japs were taking to get to Port Morsbey. They had given up the idea of a sea invasion after the Coral Sea battle and were trying it the hard way, overland. The trail from the North side of the island wound

it's way over the Owen Stanley Range, mostly a jungle growing on the sides of mountains, sometimes nearly straight up and down. This whole operation these guys were trying to pull off reminds me of a colony of ants trying to build a nest, struggling with huge things in their pinchers, while feet are stomping 'em out, but more keep coming anyway. You have to hand it to them for tenacity, but they piled up a lot of dead for that quality.

We would fly a mission or two every day, each lasting about an hour. Since the Jap forward advance reached to within 10 miles or so from our 17-mile strip, we didn't have far to fly before we started spraying bullets. You couldn't see the ground, just the tops of trees, but we knew where they were under this green mat, and just gave 'em the whole 9 yards. (27ft of 50 cal, machine gun belts)

Gen. George Kenney. and his boys were quite innovative. They were always coming up with new and novel ideas, like the parachute bomb. As we were low-level attackers, we couldn't drop bombs from our altitude of 50 ft, they would go off right under you. So they came up with this idea that attaching little parachutes to each bomb, it would hold them up long enough for us to be long gone before the explosion. It worked like a charm. we used it against the Jap supply stations along the Trail. The bombs spewing out our bellies, like salmon eggs in spawning season, were anti-personnel fragmentary types that did enormous damage. Still they kept coming!

13

Am I Dreaming? A New Airplane

We put in a couple of weeks of this kind of flying. Nobody was shot down, for that matter I never heard of any of us being attacked. I recall seeing a zero off my wing, a mile or two away, flying parallel to me. He's no threat until he turns into you. He didn't! They were fully aware of our front firepower, and being on top of the trees, they wanted no part of us.

The Group was getting in a bunch of North American B-25s from the States. They were being modified in Brisbane, and flown to us in Charters Towers one at a time. The modification was a brainchild of Maj. 'Pappy' Gunn; an old head out of the Philippines, whose position in the Group was sort of Engineering Officer at large. I never really knew what Pappy's official designation was, but he was a good friend of Gen. Kenney, and that relationship got us the position of "5th Air Force Swat Team"

The B-25 was designed as a medium altitude bomber, to operate around 6-10 thousand feet. It carried two pilots, a navigator, an upper turret gunner and a lower gunner. It wasn't blazing fast, but it was adequate in the speed department. It was maneuverable and sensitive to the touch, which stood it in good stead when the Kenney-Gunn team decided to change that designation from a B to an A.

You've heard the old expression "Give me a place to stand, and I can move the world"? Our job in the Pacific was similar, deprive the Japanese of bases and he will wither, and you accomplish this by eliminat-

ing his sea borne supply. So, attacking shipping was uppermost in the Teams thinking when they designed the "A'-25. Four 50cal. machine guns were placed in what was the Bombardiers compartment, and two 50s were put on each side of the fuselage, giving 8 50s firing forward at one time. They were sighted to hit within a 6ft box at 800 yards. The lower turret was removed, as there was no need for guns to point down.

Now we had an ideal weapon to accomplish that mission, sinking ships. And sink ships we did!

The Jap positions along the New Guinea North coast were getting in desperate straits. They had six or seven thousand men trying to hack their way to Port Moresby over the Kokoda Trail, and all the rice and guns had to be carried on their backs. It also must be brought into the coastal ports by shipping down from Rabaul, New Britain. The Buna-Gona area was a convenient place from which to supply these troops. So, MacArthur decided to invade Buna and cut the head off that dragon. This action would, at the same time, give us a landing strip north of the Owen Stanlys'. It was called Dobadura.

Back in Charters Towers, the work had been completed on the A-25 conversions, and several of the crews were transferred to the 90th Attack Squadron, me included. Each of the crews ferried their own '25' up to New Guinea to a new strip hacked out of the jungle, called 14 mile.

The flight up was not without heartache. The twelve or so planes that were to make this trip north, were loaded with everything we, and the government, owned. Deke Emerson, hometown Riverside, California was one of my tent mates at this time. He owned the phonograph player we were wearing out, and it was Deke who suggested that I carry the records, just in case! I didn't think much about that. Those kinds of thoughts never crossed my mind those days. I never sat down and thought about it, but I felt I was indestructible. Perhaps that attitude helps you get out of many a scrape, it isn't all luck.

We were to fly singly, in trail the whole 700 miles. Always, on that route from CT to Moresby, you had to negotiate a squall line about half way up. And brother, let me tell you about squall lines in the Southwest Pacific. They're hairballs of the first magnitude. I'm positioned several miles behind Deke flying at about 500 feet above the water. Deke disappeared into the clouds and shortly I followed him in. It's bumpy, my eyes are on my instruments, when, my God, suddenly a plane is coming straight at me out of the mist. We were yards apart. He pulled up and over me just missing the antennas atop my ship. If there are any more guys turning around in this soup, I'm getting the hell out of here! So I did an instrument 180-degree turn. At 90 degrees in the turn, we looked down at blazing wreckage on the water. After breaking out into the clear and getting my pulse back to normal, I pieced together what happened. Deke entered the squall, didn't like it and decided to turn around, meeting me head on. To avoid the collision he yanked back on the yoke, sent his plane into a stall, from which he couldn't recover before hitting the water. We lost more good friends and compatriots.

Our training for 'skip-bombing', we coined a new word, began with runs at an old rusted wreck left from a shipwreck many years before in the waters off Port Moresby. The idea as proposed by the General, was to take a 500 lb. Bomb into an enemy ship, as close as you can get, release it just before you had to pull up over the deck. The bomb would hit the water, skip like throwing a flat rock across a pond, and strike the ship at the waterline. It was to be fused with a 5 second delay so the attacking plane would be gone when the explosion occurred. That part was easy! Getting to the point of release is not and that's where the eight 50's come in. The Navy's torpedo planes were committed to a straight run to the target, the 'skip-bomber' was not. We could zig and zag all we wanted to, while at the same time spraying the target from stem to stern with 50 caliber machine guns. We practiced attacking two at a time, coming from the same side, at a 45-degree angle. Any fire coming from the target would, should, be divided; that

is if any heads on board were still looking up. This was the theory proposed by the Kenney-Gunn Team.

A week or so after our practice started, and we began to form opinions on the feasibility of this scheme, the General called a meeting of pilots to discuss the plan. It was held in a tent one night at the 14-mile strip. Anybody who was anybody was there. Each of us was asked to express his thoughts, and we did. There was general agreement, that against transports and smaller naval vessels, 'a piece 'o cake', but against cruisers, battleships and the like, No way!

We all knew what happened to the Torpedo Squadron at the battle of midway, annihilation. The meeting lasted a couple of hours, and the biggest thing to come out of it was the feeling we had for this man, this General of ours. Here he was in our midst, not as a commander but as just another flyer among a bunch of flyers, all talking the same language, aviation. We left the tent, some of us nodding heads other shaking theirs, but one thing we were all one on, and that was George Kenney was one helluva man! We were privileged to have him as our Head Man. After I returned to the states, he wrote a personal letter to my mother expressing his appreciation of my service in his command. Quite a guy!

All the work on the planes, all the practice on the wreck, all the talk in the tent; all of it was in preparation for the coming "big show", the battle of the Bismark Sea. Late in the afternoon of March 2, 1943, a recon flight of

B-17's spotted a convoy of Jap ships steaming south along the west side of New Britain. The forts counted eight transports accompanied by eight destroyers. Here were thousands of troops and tons of supplies headed for New Guinea. The B-17's attacked. One of the destroyers was hit and had to turn back to Rabaul from whence it came. The others ducked into some bad weather and stayed in the clouds until night-fall, when they resumed their course to Lae.

This was a 5th Air Force show, and when the curtain went up all units were in it. The B-17's were first of course, followed by B-26

Marauders of the 22nd Bomb Group, who tended to the medium bombing chores, the RAAF Beaufoots, who were first class strafes in their own right and the 3rd group, the low-level experts who showed the Japanese a couple of new tricks they never heard of. If it wasn't so pathetic, it was almost laughable. The ships were turning in all directions, like a picnic party hit by a swarm of bees. They were getting bombs in their sides, machine gun bullets on their decks and bombs down their stacks all at once. When the smoke cleared, four destroyers and eight transports decorated the bottom of the Huon Gulf. One destroyer beat it to Lae with a shipload of survivors, turned around and picked up more survivors before running back to Rabual under cover of darkness. The one remaining destroyer was disabled and dead in the water. We were back at sun up for the mop-up process. The orders read, "Police the area". First off, the last destroyer was dispatched to the bottom. Then our attention turned to the thousands of Japs in the water. Strafing these poor unfortunate soldiers was a saddening chore, but one that had to be done nevertheless. If they had made shore, they would be combat troops out to kill the enemy, namely us. I emptied my front firing 50's, then cruised over groups in the water, banking the plane sharply so the turret gunner could empty his rounds. When we flew back over the mountain, there weren't too many left adrift in the Bismark Sea. The battle lasted three days, March 2, 3 and 4; two really from the afternoon of the 2nd to the afternoon of the 4th, 48 hours. The score: six destroyers, eight transports, of 7,000 troops—4,000 lost, supplies of food and material for four months for 20,000 men, all gone! The show was a hit!

Before we leave the 'Battle of the Bismark Sea', a word is due about the messages emanating from General Headquarters, SWPA, March 4, 1943. The first from MacArthur, "We have achieved a victory of such completeness as to assume the proportions of a major disaster to the enemy. Our decisive success cannot fail to have most important results on the enemy's strategic and tactical plans. His campaign, for the time being at least is completely dislocated".

Now here is the message sent to the Groups by Gen. Kenney: "Congratulations, I am tickled to death!" I think this goes to illustrate why we so admired George C. Kenney.

With the Jap's supplies on the bottom of the sea, it pretty much put an end to their campaign in North Papua. Their Buna invasion was worn down to a few left over snipers lashed to the tops of a few coconut trees, taking potshots at some G.I. sightseers wandering around without helmets. A couple of guys were shot that way, bringing forth orders to stay out of there until the area was secured, and as soon as it was, we began using the strip at Dobadura as an advanced base for operations against costal shipping up and down the north shore of New Guinea, from Milne Bay to Finschafen. We set up a makeshift camp beside the runway in which to spend several days while we patrolled the coast. There were a few pockets of Japs still operating in Papua, Lae and Salamaua, about 30 miles apart. They were being supplied by submarines, which were surfacing during the day, until the B-17's attacked them. We knew when they were to surface because we had broken the Jap code long before, and they didn't catch on to that. They weren't stupid so it's hard to understand why they didn't put two and two together and figure out that all these 'lucky' hits we were making wasn't all luck. Waiting for the convoy in the Bismark Sea, waiting in the clouds for Adm. Yamamoto, showing up just as a sub surfaces, wouldn't you get a little suspicious, they didn't though. Unbelievable! That Yamamoto bushwhacking was pulled off by another one of my roommates in flying school, Tom Lanphier from Boise, Idaho. He was flying a P-38.

14

The Lights of Lae

The B-17 attack scared them off bringing subs into the harbor during daylight, so they switched the unloading to nighttime, figuring they would be safe then. They didn't know Maj. Ed Larner and his 90th Attack Squadron. Morning, noon or night if it was there Ed was going to hit it! We were informed of the sub surfacing at a certain hour, like 9 or 10 p.m. on this night, which was moonless. Ed cooked up an elaborate plan to surprise them right in the middle of their unloading operation, when they were most vulnerable. He gathered a few of us around and laid out this intricate plan of attack. He would lead, with a wingman, followed by four planes, led by me. The trip was about 200 miles to the north and we all would fly just a few feet over the water so as to avoid enemy radar. I was to position my four ships a mile behind his two-ship element leading the way. After flying over the water several miles at sea, he would turn in to the harbor, and at sea level, make a run toward the docks. While inside the bay, he would pull up to 1,000 ft. and throw out flares, which would light the scene for me and my wingmen coming in at sea level and find the sub a sitting duck. We would blow it out of the water, and another brilliant maneuver would go in the book.

Things never quite work that way. "The best laid plans of mice and men". This one was no different. Right from the gate, this was star crossed. We imposed 'no lights' and strict silence on the radios. It was blacker than the inside of a closet, so wouldn't you know that taxiing out to the runway, two of my guys collided wingtips and dropped out of the race. No radios, so no conversation about this, just go. I had one

guy with me now, I guessed we could get the job done; after all, there was only one submarine. This was the toughest hour of flying I ever experienced in the pilots seat of an airplane. If it was simply an instrument flight, but it wasn't! To set the altimeter at 0, I inched the ship (it's almost a ship, isn't it?) down until the props threw spray. You can't miss that point, the ship starts to shake violently, pull up a little and that will be our flight altitude for the rest of the trip. To keep in position, a mile directly behind, my reference was the flame from the exhausts in front of me. If you drift off a little to either side, the flames go out. I got kind of bleary-eyed watching those lights so intensely, and had to look away frequently to keep focused. When we came abreast of the Jap installation at Salamaua, 40 miles or so east of Lae, they sky lit up by a searchlight, sweeping from east to west. I suppose they heard us and were searching they sky, but in any case, they knew we were there, and this was no longer a surprise. I fully expected Ed to break the radio silence and call an abort. Did he? No! And even though we knew the sub would be long gone, he barrels ahead anyway. We get there! Turn in to the harbor mouth expecting to see the whole place light up by the flares the guys up front were to throw at 1,000 feet high. We are racing in on the deck and all I saw was an orange glow in the water, and then out. The flares didn't work, or more likely, they pitched them out too soon and they ignited in the water. So, no lights! Not good ones that is, there were plenty of the other kind. The harbor was shaped like a horseshoe and the Japs ringed it with anti-aircraft lights. At first all of them were probing the sky overhead, when some smart guy figured out that all the noise was coming from the deck, and that's when I watched that guy swing his light down and caught me square in its beam. Before they brought the guns to bear on me, that light went out. Providence? I'm too young to die! I have a mission in life! Who knows? What happened borders on the unbelievable. Ed Larner was at 800 feet when he saw the searchlight sweep down and catch me. He then did a split-S, roll on your back and swoop down, and shot out that light with his eight 50's. That gave me the chance to 'scramble' my wingman, pull up

in a chandelle, change directions 180 degrees, and get the hell out of there. On the way out I'm in the lights again, and this time they are throwing shells. I say throwing, because that's what they look like, red glowing baseballs come at you so slow you could catch 'em if you had a mitt. When you can see these things you can dodge them. The one that get you, you don't see.

We got out, but we paid a price. Ed's wingman, in scrambling out of there flew into a hill west of the harbor. We lost more good friend and compatriots.

The debriefing back at Dobadura, an hour later, brought forth some facts that I didn't know. To begin with I had no idea why that light, that had me dead to rights, suddenly went out. Then I listened to Ed tell his side. Can you stand with your mouth wide open, at the same time crack a big smile? That's the way it felt. I got yanked back from the 'jaws of death' by this fantastic flyer. I owed him one, which I was never able to repay.

Just to prove that this maneuver did happen, Ed's turret gunner had both of his thumbs broken from the 50 caliber shell boxes on the floor, slamming his hands holding the gun rings when they turned upside down.

The following morning, Larner led the squadron back up to Lae to have a look around for our lost wingman. It was futile. We flew as close as the mouth of the harbor with no response by the Japs, until, on the second pass, our leader, Ed Larner, banked his plane and pointed his nose, momentarily, at the defenders. All hell broke loose. He quickly turned back and they stopped firing. It was obvious why we were there, and they knew it, but when he feinted to attack they opened up. When we landed, Ed explained that he wanted the Japs to know who it was out there, and hoped they got a good look at the sign decorating both sides of his B-25. In huge letter it said "SPOOK". He told us that it was an endearing nickname for his wife. Most pilots had some kind of a name, or picture of Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth or maybe just some body parts of a disproportionate, no-name blonde. I had three words,

it was supposed to be Japanese; to this day I don't know if it was. "Chicka Mata Hiya' according to someone, the translation is "Kiss My Ass". Whatever we had our crew chief paint; it was small, usually very well painted and seldom vulgar. If it were too out of line, the Commanding Officer would make them scrub it. I saw that only once. Remember, this is a man's game where killing and death is the name so you would not expect to find 'hearts and flowers' decorating these weapons. The most popular names were wives, girlfriends and movie starlets. Next, I think were places, like 'Memphis Belle' and 'Spirit of Saint Louis'. OOPS! That was Lindberg. Whatever the name, it was a source of pride to the crews. What a great bunch of guys these flight crews and mechanics were. This was no 9 to 5 job their work was never done. The only time they could sit down was when their plane was out on a mission. When it returned, it started all over again.

We were using Dobadura as an advanced base, which necessitated flying over the Owen Stanlys, an adventure in its own right. So the time had come, GHQ said to move on for good. We were to take everything, lock, stock and barrel. The first to load up for the ferry flight was Maj. Lerner. He packed 13 guys, all their gear and a couple of 500 lb. Bombs, which we needed on the other side. It was always Ed's signature to buzz the strip before landing, and this time was no exception. The exception this time was the right engine quit as he pulled it up, throwing him into a flat spin from which he could not recover. All were killed in the crash. We lost more good friend and compatriots.

It was nearing the end of March now, and the Japanese were down to their last bowl of rice, primarily because of our air patrol of the waters off Papua effectively dried up seaborne supplies from Rabaul. Runs by coastal steamers, barges and submarines were limited to night and bad weather. Trying to supply seven or eight thousand troops under these conditions is one tough proposition. These guys were not about to surrender, march on a ship, get transported to Melbourne and sit out the war drinking tea. These guys were dangerous to the bitter

end. Don't they call it Bushida, the code of the warrior? If they get killed, they don't get 10,000 yen, instead they get a seat in the 'Hereafter' alongside the Emperor and Tojo. That prospect makes for pretty tough resistance. I never heard of a POW camp in Australia. I don't believe we collected any candidates. If we did, I wonder what was done with them.

We spent the next three months flying patrols of the North shore of New Guinea. There wasn't much bombing involved, as the targets were mostly small coastal steamers, barges and the like, which were easily dispatched by our machine guns. I recall being on a patrol with two other guys, when we came upon one of these boats a bit offshore. It was about the size of a tug, and was not underway. We opened up with all our 50s at once. That's 24 guns riddling this wooden tub, turning it into kindling in three seconds. That activity was the last of my combat flying in the Southwest Pacific theater. In mid-June I, along with all the guys from Class 41-H who came over on the Convoy out of Pearl Harbor on Dec 1st, 41, at least those of us that were left, received orders to return to the USA for reassignment. It's over, over here! Of the 19 flying cadets who volunteered to go to the Philippines that day at Stockton Field, seven did not make it home.

15

Goodbye Australia, Hello Los Angeles

The long flight home started in Brisbane aboard an LB-30 of the Air Transport Command. First stop, New Caledonia, the island of the red dust, where we fueled up for the next leg to Johnson Island, a fly-speck in the Pacific. Next to Honolulu, on to San Francisco and then to Los Angeles.

A day of home cooking and I was ready to hit the 'rest & recreation' trail, which meant rounds of old haunts, with some new ones thrown in. Somebody called the L A Times to interview Larronde and me. The meet was setup for Jim's house in Hollywood, on the front porch, complete with a reporter, a cameraman, and a nice selection of booze, compliments of Jin. The news guys sat with us all afternoon talking war and sipping grog. It was lucky that the story got written. I guess most interviews those days of tight booze, weren't done in an atmosphere of 'all you can drink' Anyway, Our pictures and our story wound up on nearly all of page two of the LA Times, June 28, 1943. Now that's publicity!

Next thing worth reciting was having our pictures taken by the premiere photographer of the Stars, Hollywood's John E Reed. He had a studio on Sunset Blvd that sported a huge, 3'x5' portrait display case on the front lawn. In it he placed my picture. The same one you see of the author in this book. It caused a stir. His place was getting calls wanting to know the identity of the flyer in the window. I have since come to believe that it isn't 'good looks' that attracts, rather it's the

celebrity status. I could have looked like Quasimodo it wouldn't have mattered. The rest of the week saw us doing the nightclub scene, Earl Carrols, Ciro's, you name it, and we were there, showgirls on each arm. Quite a welcome home!

I didn't arrive with many clothes, none that were presentable, so I went to Phelps Terkel, an old USC haberdasher, and spotted a summer uniform on a rack that was super, a chest full of ribbons and all. Asked, "who's uniform is this?" Why, that's Elliot Roosevelt's. "I want one just like it, can you make it in one week? And that's how I left town, looking like a million dollars. United Airlines took us out of town to New Orleans where we changed to National Air for the trip to Tampa Florida, and reassignment. The flight down there was not without incident. The aircraft was a twin-engine commuter size with about 15 passengers aboard. Somewhere over the Gulf, at night, we lost an engine. The crew put us down in Pensacola, Florida where we were to wait for another craft to pick us up. That was a long wait, till noon the next day, all of it spent in a suffocating, flea bag hotel in a chair in the lobby. In spite of all this, we made it to Tampa and a joyous reunion with the guys from Australia. It hit me on the way down here, chills and fever. At the airport in New Orleans, six of us crammed into a limo for a ride to the Roosevelt Hotel downtown. I was shivering from the cold and asked my mates to roll up the windows. They looked at me like you would expect. This was July in New Orleans. Cold? I must be a raving lunatic. I was raving all right, but I wasn't a lunatic. "Roll up the windows, I'm freezing". I think they did, reluctantly. After an hour wait, Jim and I got to a room where I called for the house doctor. He looked me over, turned to Jim and told him to go get me a laxative, castoria, or something. Jim, the doctor and I thought we had found the answer, because when I got up later in the morning, I felt pretty good. There was still only one minor problem left, I felt like skipping breakfast. I ignored it! The signs were there, but of course I didn't recognize them until Jim and I got on the train at Tampa for the ride to our new assignment, Lake Charles, LA. The train made a stop in New Orleans

after an overnight run from Tampa, and while shaving and preparing to hit "The Big Easy"; I noticed the whites of my eyes weren't white anymore. They were yellow!

"Hey Jim, look at my eyes! What the hell is this?" "Yeah, they're yellow! My Aunt had that, I remember". "What do you think it is?" "I don't know, but I think it's kinda serious". With that good news, we decided to waste no time getting to the Roosevelt Hotel where the Fountain Lounge was loaded with Officers drinking their lunch, and sporting caduceus on their uniform blouses. I didn't get one foot in the door before running into a major wearing just such an insignia, a doctor! "Heh Doc, can I speak to you a minute? Take a look at my eyes. What is it?" He wasted no time telling me "Yeah, you got it" My God! I got what? Then he tells me he's got the same thing, hepatitis, and I had better get my ass out to LaGuard General Hospital pronto. So Jim and I passed up a noontime libation, flagged a cab and hightailed it to the infirmary on Lake Pontchartrain, where I am to spend the next two and a half months.

My stay there in the hospital wasn't all that bad. Aside from the first two weeks when I was confined to the ward containing a bunch of busted up officers, most of the remaining time was spent in the streets and gin mills of New Orleans. The last two weeks, we were only required to show up for Dr.'s rounds each morning at 10 o'clock. What a way to run a hospital! But we liked it.

The day came when I was to continue my journey to Lake Charles. A few hours train ride and the gang met me at the station. They couldn't wait to tell me about the Texas T-Bone steak we were going to eat that night. You know, describing steaks is a little like describing the fish you caught last week, How Big? Well, it did lap over all four points of the plate all right. Tender? About as tender as a Texas Ranger. I didn't get the steak digested before the guys announced that we were all transferred to Oklahoma City and would be on our way tomorrow morning. I never even got to see the runway at L.C.A.A.B. (Lake Charles Army Air Base).

Jim bought a Buick sedan in Lake Charles, so he and I had wheels to roll to Oklahoma City. Like the way it's been going lately, don't get too familiar with the place, orders are on the way. They sure were, "Get to Florence South Carolina". "You know where that is, Jim?" "Never heard of it". "Well, why don't you get a road map over there in that country store, and while you're at it, pick up a six pac, it's hot here in Oklahoma". "Yeah, it's also near beer here in Oklahoma, who can drink that crap? I'll get some Cokes!"

The scenic trip through the South skirted the Ozarks and took us into Memphis, where we spent a delightful evening atop the Peabody Hotel's roof garden readjustment center. With a rebel yell, we're off to Atlanta, with visions of peaches dancing in our eyes. The center of operations was the Henry Grady Hotel on Peachtree Street and what a night it was! How could two innocent babes in the woods from Hollywood get into a mess like this? It ain't easy, but here's how. After a nice Southern cooked meal in the dining room, we retired to the bar, naturally, whereupon we met another Air Corp type who seemed to be burdened with three Dixie Chicks. With his suggestion, which was met with enthusiasm all around, that we all have a party in Jim's room, the friendly group headed for the elevator. I think somebody from the Christian Coalition must have followed us, because the strip poker game barely got started when the door started to rattle and a voice yelled, "Open up, this is the house detective". When we opened the door, this guy was standing beside two big Air Policemen, white helmets and puttees. "Uh, Oh Jim, get your shirt on, we got trouble" "Tell 'em it's hot in here". Since I was the ranking officer in this brugh, it befell me to talk our way out of this mess. The Air cops were reasonable. It was the lousy house dick that was hard to deal with. He was intent on putting the Chicks in the coop. So the one thing that usually works, I tried. "Officer, why don't you take this 20 and get a cab for these ladies and forget the whole thing!" "That's a good idea, they'll get right out of the hotel, thanks captain". Nobody ever saw a cab!

16

Put on Your Traveling Shoes

After dodging that bullet we set the Buick on course for our destination, Florence, Army Air Base. The town was situated in the north/central part of the State, with nothing anywhere near to distinguish it, with the possible exception of the river PEE DEE, immortalized in limericks invented in every college frat house in the Country. After looking over the BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters), which wasn't even an upgrade from our living conditions in Charters Towers, and that was in a tent, we decided to look around for a 'little house on the prairie'. We found one in Darlington, a few miles North. We got a third guy to go with us and share the rent, Capt. McWhirt. We pioneered! Darlington became, in recent years, a center for "good 'ol boys' auto racing.

Our job at this Base was to deliver transitional training in the use of an A-20 in combat. The students were a bunch of rosy-cheeked shave-tails fresh out of flying school. As for flying with them, out of the question, the A-20 having but one seat in the cockpit, so our savvy instruction consisted mainly of bull-sessions in a classroom environment, and that's a hellova lot more than the poor guys in the 39th Fighter Squadron got before they looked down a gun barrel. Other than that, I don't recall doing much of anything in Florence. Surprisingly, I did run into a Sgt. on the Base, George Moody, the late SMC (president) of my fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha, while we were at USC. "George, you gotta come to our house for Thanksgiving, I'll cook a turkey". A memorable holiday to say the least.

In a roundabout way, we got acquainted with the town bookmaker and bootlegger. He was a friendly sort who offered to share his 'Mountain dew' while we were assisting him, and his friendly daughter, in counting the money from his daily numbers racquet he was running in Florence Best corn liquor I ever tasted (of course I never tasted any before). His wife was a friendly type too, but Jim and I drew the line at assisting her in anything she might have in mind. This is Redneck country. They have rules here we never heard of. One false move, and you could wind up married or dead.

One day in February, the following year '44, on a flight back from Tampa, I was met at the ramp by a jeep and driver who said only "The Colonel wants to see you immediately" All the way to his office. "What have I done wrong?" Was that a guilty conscience? No, the Colonel surprised me saying, "How long will it take you to pack to go to Europe?" Wow! I said, 1 hour. And with that, I began my last half of WWII.

The trip to New York began that very afternoon. There were three of us given these orders, myself, Jim Larronde and Chuck Bowman, also from the 3rd Group in Australia. We were chosen for this duty because of our experience in low-level skip bombing in the Southwest Pacific. It seems that Bomber Command in London heard of our exploits in the Bismark Sea, and figured they could use that method to answer a perplexing problem they had with destroying the German submarine pens along the coasts of Holland, Belgium and France. They were ready to attack, using B-26 Marauders in a low level attempt to skip the bombs into the sub pens, where the 12 feet of concrete roof couldn't protect them. The concept was sound; the execution was not. Consequently, the phone rang in General Headquarters, "Get those guys from the Pacific who blew the Jap navy away, and get this job done" Result: First Class, number one priority tickets for three to London.

We slid into La Guardia late in the afternoon, just minutes before a snowstorm that lasted a week. As luck would have it, I always felt that

the snowstorm that delayed our departure for a week was primarily responsible for losing those brave airmen who were sent on this unrehearsed, misguided attack at IJmuiden, Holland. Their impatience was costly.

We successfully begged rooms in the Waldorf Astoria, an unheard of feat those days. If anybody goes to New York these days, Let me recommend this hotel highly, the service is superb, and cheap! I shall never forget the look on the Bellhop's face when he opened our suitcases. There were three, one for me, one for Jim and the largest one, for everybody, it was full of booze, enough to last us 'till we get out of here, maybe.

The snowstorm snowed and moved on. The only trouble was, it moved on across the North Atlantic and directly in our path to England, which today would matter naught in the age of flying among the Angels, our C-54s had to wait for more friendly skies.

So, let's have a look at New York. I don't know where all these people came from, all of a sudden. We must have been passing out invitations and room numbers in the Lounge; I believe it was called Peacock Alley. Should have left the room door open and saved wear and tear on the hinges.

I got on the phone and called an old acquaintance from LA, Joan Shea, one of the Shea girls I went to grammar school with. My mother asked me to look her up if I got to New York. She had a big shot job in the radio business, something to do with labor management. Anyway, she's going to show me around. She had an apartment on E 54th Street, which impressed me when I stepped through the door. You must realize that a fine Irish lass is going to do just great in 'Labor Management' in New York, after all, She's a member of the Clan'

She hauled me around to nightclubs and restaurants, and not to be outdone, a handsome cab in Central Park. It was in the cab, don't get ahead of me, that she was singing a silly little song that I couldn't understand the words to."Mairsey Doats and Dosey Doats" "What did you say, Jonie?" She taught me! "Mares eat oats and does eat oats and

little lambs eat ivy.” It was brand new, and we sang that till we parted company, She to her job, and me to the war.

By way of name-dropping, Bowman and I went to the Copa Cabana one night, wings and medals on display, took a table in the lounge, and began to sip. The waiter came over and asked if we would like to join Mr. Prosser’s table. That’s Monty Prosser who owns the joint. “Sure!” The waiter settled our drinks on the table, and at Prossers command, escorted us through the kitchen to a seat in the showroom downstairs. We watched Jimmy Durante put on his act then returned to the celebrity table. “Captain, meet so and so, and so and so, and meet the Champ, Jack Dempsey”. “How do you do Champ, hellova war isn’t it?” The small talk went on till four in the morning, and then came the shocker. All the drinks Bo and I had were added up on a bill presented to us. I suppose that’s all right, but it was unexpected.

The day came when the weather cleared and our flight was called. After packing up what little was left of the booze, and leaving a token or two on the dresser, we followed the bellhop out the door, where to our surprise all the maids and others who had provided room service, were lined up like a squad of soldiers. We went down the line shaking hands with these people, “Goodbye, good luck” and slipped into the elevator. You know how you ride in an elevator; you never look another person in the eye, you scan the floor or the ceiling. Well, half way down, Jim and I did look at each other in the eye. I don’t recall who said it first “Do you suppose all those people were waiting for a tip? “Oh, my God!” So, you see, the service at the Waldorf IS cheap, so are some of the guests.

Off in the limo to LaGuardia and our briefing for the flight to Prestwick in Scotland. It’s a long grind those days, something like 12 hours in the air, with a fuel stop in Goose Bay Labrador, a place colder than a well diggers shovel in February. A meal, a drink, and off again to Scotland.

17

Over There

We de-planed under a cloudy sky and a cold, blustery wind. What else? This is Scotland! The greeting the Scots put on was warm, however. Red-cheeked girls, with hair to match, dressed in tartan skirts with kilts, did a jig to sounds from a bagpipe. Or was that a fling, jigs, I think, were danced in Ireland. In any case, it was a welcome reminder that we were leaving the comforts of the “new world” and stepping back into the ‘old’ one with all its pain and suffering.

Uncle Sam bought us tickets on the ‘Flying Scot’, the premier train in the UK, so the trip down to London was comfortable, to say the least; private compartment, tea and crumpets in the morning, shoes returned shined outside the door, Yes, we weren’t soon to find this quality of travel on either side of the Atlantic.

Our first stop was the Headquarters, 9th Air Force, where we presented our orders to some Adjutant, who eventually returned another set directing us to appear at the 9th Bomber Command. So, we took a staff car ride across town to BC. To paint the right colors on the picture of operations here in England, let me tell you that the 9th Air Force medium bombers played second fiddle to the heavies of the 8th Bomber Command. Many, many of the B-26 raids into France and the low countries, were diversionary tactics to draw heat off the B17 bomb runs into Germany. This is not to say the 9th bombers were regarded as sacrificial lambs staked out to draw the predators, rather the 8th Air Force, with its glamorous Flying Fortress, was given the role of leader in the air war against the 3rd Reich. To their everlasting credit, two of

Hollywood's biggest, Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart, promoted their way into crew seats in 8th AF B-17s. Their presence did great honor to themselves, and to the attendant publicity given to their "choice" of service. As for me, I could care less about politics, military or civilian. As far as I was concerned, an airplane was an airplane and a cannon ball coming at you looked the same, whether you were in a B-17 or a C-47 flying for Troop Carrier, a definitely non-glamorous job.

Our first night in London! Don't you just know we're looking for the action? Somebody told us of a joint in Charing Cross, a short ride from the Red Cross pad we fell into, that offered the top piano bar in town.

The piano player was a friendly sort, so I smugly inquired if he knew the latest song from the States. "No? Well let me teach you". "Now it goes like this" "Maresy Doats and Dosey Doats" At the end of the night he, and all the rest of the happy throng, were wearing the thing out trying to get it right. It's a challenge to remember the words after the 5th martini. A few days later, would you believe, this Liberace put a big ad in the London Times proclaiming himself to be the guy that introduced the King's entire realm to this great composition. I guess he did at that. They didn't hear me sing it first. Bomber Command was in the West end of London, the Mayfare district I believe it is called, strictly the upscale part of the city. You don't believe the 'brass' in this business would put their HQ farther than a one-shilling taxi ride from the finest hotels and restaurants in town, do you? Of course not! Aside from the GI's behind the typewriters, I didn't see anybody under the rank of Major in the place; I would have to look in the mirror to see that.

Jim, Bo and I presented our orders and took a seat, and that's about all we did for the next week. If they knew why we were here, they were keeping it a secret. It was something they didn't want to talk about. WE found out why before long. These people had orchestrated two raids on the sub pens in Holland, with disastrous results. In the first attack, they employed 12 B-26 Marauders most of which, but not all,

were destroyed or damaged. Shortly thereafter, they tried again. This time it was worse. We were told the whole Squadron was shot down. That was probably an exaggeration brought on by their frustration over the thing, but it was, nevertheless, a catastrophe of major proportions. And here we are, three junior officers, sent over here to tell them how to do it. Do you think they wanted to hear it! So we sat! We got some people to tell us what really happened, and the mistakes were appalling. To begin with, there was no rehearsal where low-level formation flying is practiced. The guys flying these B-26s normally fly at 8-10 thousand feet. Their impression of low level is a bit lower than 500 feet. To us, that was flying in the clouds. So the first mistake they made was not skipping the waves and avoiding early radar detection by the enemy. The second serious mistake made, was faulty navigation. It was imperative that the formation hit the target directly from the sea in order to create surprise. As it happened, they missed their landfall somewhat, and had to alter course, which gave the Germans more time to prepare for the strike. The third big mistake, and you have to lay this one on the planners; they set the bombs with 5-minute delay fuses. We really didn't know how many, if any, bombs did in fact skip into the pens. We do know that the Germans made the Dutch slave workers at the installation, pick up the bombs and put them in a ditch, where they all sat around and watched them go off; one hellova 4th of July, eh? When we skipped bombs into the sides of ships, we didn't give the crew time to launch lifeboats and row away. So Bomber Command had three captains on their hands, excess property.

The 9th Air Force was structured as follows; Bomber command and Fighter Command were responsible for all the activities by those under their direction. Each of those major commands was made up of three Wings, each of which controlled several Groups, each one of which was composed of several Squadrons. So it was that Jim and I were sent to the 99th Bomb Wing, and Charley Bowman was ordered to the 97th.

A Bomb Wing is about as useful as teats on a boar hog. The job I found myself doing, was answering the telephone, noting the particulars of the next day's missions, calling the Groups in our Wing and passing this information along. After they got the word, I would go to a huge wall map of Europe, stick pins and ribbons in it to track tomorrow's raid, then go back and sit down and wait to see if the phone would ring asking clarification of the bomb load, or take off time, or whatever. Most of the time they got it right the first time around. Why anybody needed this level of Command I didn't know then, but have long since figured out.

The Military is a huge organization with a whole lot of people, most of whom are scrambling around trying to get promoted, or get a better job, an easier or safer one, and in order to do that there must be a ladder to climb to reach those goals. So unnecessary positions are manufactured to place people 'on the go', like the case in point, The 99th Bomb Wing. The TO (table of organization) called for a Brigadier General, a Colonel, two or three Majors, a handful of Captains and junior officers. This to play telephone operator, and maintain a war room that nobody looked at except the General that owned the thing. There was no earthly reason, other than the one I just recited, why the Bomber Command couldn't have called these orders directly to the Groups. Who needed this 'brassy' middleman? Thatcher did, Brig. Gen., Thatcher the CO, he needed another star or two.

Our Headquarters was an old Manner House, somebody's country estate, in East Anglia near the town of Great Dunmow. It was a quaint looking place, a Tudor style of architecture, brown boards and battens over whitewashed walls. Most of the surrounding houses had roofs of thick thatch, making this neighborhood a step back in time; to pre Revolutionary war, I would guess. The living-dining room was just inside the front door, and was dominated by a huge fireplace, which incidentally was the only source of heat in this large room. I never saw the kitchen, I never thought enough of it to walk in and see it. The Officers had rooms upstairs, each with a fireplace. For transportation

we had a couple of Jeeps parked outside, for official business of course, when there wouldn't be a conflict with a trip to London, and perhaps an inspection of a nightclub or two which had been placed on the 'out of bounds' list. Just kidding of course!

Great Dunmow is but a short drive from the town of Cambridge, and the University of the same name. Didn't ex-president Bill Clinton Matriculate there? No matter what you did there, you did it in broad daylight. All of the UK was on double daylight savings time. You add that to the normal setting of the sun at these latitudes, and at midnight, it's still light enough to read a newspaper on the sidewalk.

But what concerns us more is what happened inside that Manner House we called HQ. As I said, it was ruled by the General, a quiet sort of guy, who appeared to be always preoccupied with something he never would share with his subordinates. In other words, we never really got to know him. This was no palace, and if you didn't go out 'on the town', you spent the evening playing gin, or poker around the dining room table. General Thatcher seldom participated. But on this night he did! I was in the game of course, as was Jim. Others with seats were: Captain Doolittle, son of Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, 8th AF Commander, two Polish officers, George Osuchowski and Marion Skubala, and the adjutant major. These were colorful people. 'Do' as he was always called, was in a class by himself as an 'unforgettable character'. By Officer standards he could be described as 'sloppy'. He tied his shoes with wire, and, so help me, I believe he gave himself a haircut, without benefit of a looking glass. Never mind his behavior, we all loved DO, for his warm, 'St Bernard' personality, in turn, he loved everyone. George and Marion had finished combat tours with the RAF, and as a 'reward' they were sent here to 'sit it out for awhile'. Before the war George was an aristocrat in Poland, a Baron or something, and exhibited that European 'polish' that Americans have only seen in the movies. To me, he was the 'spitting image' of another George, George Sanders, late of MGM. George was unbeatable at Gin and fascinated us with stories of his days of prowling the 'crusty'

haunts of privileged Europeans, Monte Carlo, Baden Baden, etc. He ranked up there with Do in that 'Unforgettable Character' category.

In this game that we played, little more than 'penny anti' poker, the biggest bet of the night might be five pounds, most of the time it was 1 pound. The game went along in the usual manner until one hand when the General raised the bet five pounds. George was seated next to the Gen. so' without hesitation, and in a matter-of-fact tone, he said, "I raise 100 pounds". At that, Jim 'screamed "100 POUNDS! The echo of that outburst barely subsided, whereupon Thatcher threw his cards in the air, pushed his chair back and stormed out of the room. Puzzled look on George's face, "Did I do something wrong"? "No George, the Gen. was pissed at Larronde for disrupting the game". But we couldn't talk George out of believing he had insulted the General, and as a result of this unfortunate incident, George requested his superiors to put him back on combat status with the RAF. It didn't take long; he was gone the next day, and dead in a fortnight. His Lancaster was hit and exploded carrying a 2-ton Tess over Germany (a 4000 lb bomb).

The duty here was not for me. I was a pilot, and I wanted to fly airplanes, and this wasn't the place to do it. All we ever got to fly here was an L-5, a little kite the Army used for chores similar to a jeep. I graduated from this in Civilian flying school. So, I asked the 'powers' if they could get me transferred to a flying job somewhere, and they did, beyond my wildest dreams. As I had completed a combat tour in the Pacific, a return to combat flying was not an option, so to land a job which was a pilots dream, I was grateful no end, and enjoyed my time over there doing what I liked best, flying airplanes, all kinds of airplanes.

18

Pilot Heaven Here on Earth

My new station was West of London, near the other famous university, Oxford. As soon as I got settled into my quarters, a Quonset hut heated with a coal burning potbellied stove that glowed cherry red constantly, because it was cold constantly, day or night. England is a soggy, damp, cold place most of the time. The natives claim a warm month, enough to call it 'Flamin June'. I spent two of them there, and never did understand what they were talking about.

I came here to fly, so let's talk about the greatest job on earth for a pilot that I fell into, and it lasted till the end of the war here in Europe. The Outfit was called the 31st Air Transport Group, consisting of three squadrons of C-47 transport aircraft, and one squadron, the 326th Ferrying Squadron, the one to which I was assigned. It was a Group that did anything that needed to be done, transporting people and material, ferrying airplanes anywhere in the UK, and later on the Continent, and carrying out any wild scheme some brass-head thought up in HQ. The ferrying job took me to airfields all over England. The purpose was to fly war weary planes no longer fit for air combat that needed more maintenance than the home field could supply, to a major depot in Northern Ireland. On days I flew, perhaps five days a week, I sometimes made 2 or 3 trips, each in a different aircraft, a bomber on one trip, a fighter the next. These were all planes of the 9th Air Force; the big heavies of the 8th AF had their own pilots. Excluding the B-17s, I believe I flew every type aircraft we had in the UK, and even some belonging to the British. Some of these flights were momentous, flights

to stand your hair on end, flights to recall with pride, and flights filled with the excitement of doing something first. I was in 'pilots heaven' right here on earth.

Our Base was called Grove. I don't know if that was a town or village, closest town being Wantage, an ancient place founded by Alfred the Great. An air-base depot occupied one side of the runway, and was the depository of the beat-up B-26s who made their last run over France, and were awaiting their last flight to Belfast where they will be cannibalized for spare parts. Flying these junkers was tricky business, even though you got them into the air, they might not stay there. One didn't one day, right in front of me, with my good friend Bob Skiles at the controls. An engine quit on take-off and he plowed into a grove of trees just off the Base. He lived but lost both of his legs and got a ticket home. I seldom ever flew the first one of these Marauders they handed me. If it didn't sound right, I would ask for another, and another, until I got one that did. If you fly long enough, it's the 'sound' of the engine that overrides all else. Instruments are important of course, but they don't tell you what your ears do, and my ears saved me on many occasion in this flying business.

There were two bases in Ireland that took these crates; the bombers went to Belfast and the fighters to Greencastle, just north of the border with the Republic. It was the Greencastle trip we coveted because that's where we got the eggs. Several farmhouses were near the airfield and we could hop a jeep to one, kick the goats out of the doorways and make a deal with Mrs. O'Leary for a few dozen fresh eggs. The earthbound guys back home could kiss us. Which brings up a point of wonderment to me. I knew Lucky Strike Green' went to war, but what happened to all the chickens in England? Bombing must have scared them out of laying eggs. All we ever saw for breakfast was powdered eggs; life sustaining but little else.

This type of flying occupied me for a couple of months. On one occasion I flew into a base where the Commander was Ed Bacus, now Brig. General Bacus, my old CO in Australia and Java. We chatted

awhile, recalled our dive on the Japs in Bali, and talked of those guys in the 91st. It was a small world those days!

The last year of the war for me was there at Grove split with a six-month stay in France after D-Day and I thoroughly enjoyed every day of it. The buddies on the base were a bunch of great guys who were out to win a war without having to give up a good time doing it. We got into London often as the train took an hour to reach Paddington Station. That's the West End where all the GI's hung out, and needless to say, where all the action was. It didn't take too long to learn the ropes, where to stay, the red Cross ran a hotel for officers where you could roost for a few shillings a night, the best restaurants to hit, a Greek and a Belgian place I recall being pre-war quality, But the one place you would never forget, was the Officers Mess in the Grosvenor House. It occupied the main ballroom, a room that seated 1000 at one time on the main floor. A balcony surrounded the room, in which a continuous bar served another 1000 Officers waiting their chance to descend the twin circular stairways to the Buffet (I wouldn't dare call it a 'chow line' but of course that's what it was) on the stage of this huge ballroom. The sight of all these American Officers, in dress uniform, together in one place was astounding, inspiring, and gratifying to look upon, here in a foreign land, and realize "I am one of these!" It would be part of you forever, it is with me!

Another 'hangout' for the Air Corps guys, was a restaurant and bar nearby called The Deanery Club. Any time of the day or night, you could expect to walk into a group of fliers all talking 'war', what else! One day I perched up on a bar stool and who should be sitting next to me but Ernie Pyle himself. Those of you, who don't know who EP was, let me say he was America's most revered, most loved journalist to cover the war. He was called the GI's friend because it was their story he told, from the hedgerows, the foxholes and the mud. He wrote about the guys Mauldin used to draw, GI Jo and Sad Sack by Sgt. Baker. He gave them the importance they deserved. Ernie didn't live long, not long enough. A Jap sniper shot him while he was writing the

GI's story of their war in the Pacific. We talked war, Ernie and I, Mostly because he spotted my Pacific Theater ribbon, and since he was headed that way, he wanted to know my view of that part of the war. A few drinks, some pleasant conversation, and Ernie Pyle and I parted company, the encounter never to be forgotten, at least by me.

You never knew whom you were going to run into in the Deanery Club. Sitting on a bar stool one day, who should hobble in but a fraternity brother of mine from USC. Here's Ed Ernst' with his leg encased in plaster and navigating around on a pair of crutches. "Ed, my God, what happened to you old buddy?" what happened was, he got in front of a Messerschmitt when he should have been on its tail, and took a German shell in his foot. Did I say this was a small world!

One of the guys in the 313th Transport Squadron, of our Group, Del Skow, was a Basic instructor at Cal Aero flying school while I was there. One day, he and I had some business over at the Air Depot and walked right into an old friend, my primary instructor, the guy that took up where Al Williams left off, and Skow's co-worker at Maj. Mosley's Air Academy. I'm sure I said "Its a small world, let me say it again!" Del was a born clown, he loved to entertain, in a kooky sort of way, so we worked up a little act where I accompanied him on the piano while he recited something he made up. I didn't know the first thing about a piano, but my role called for pounding out a cord or two in time to his metre. I don't remember all of what he said, it always broke the audience up in loud laughter, but I do remember the last verse, "And now, Mrs. Pettybone, if youease" I hope Skow is still back in North Dakota making 'em laugh.

19

It's What We've Been Looking For

It turns to June in England and you would think the island would sink from the weight of all the tanks, guns, and trucks you see everywhere. It was obvious D-Day was imminent; there was no more room to store this stuff. So June 6 arrived and fixed that problem. Early that morning, I was called to the HQ office of Col, Allen, the Group commander, and told I was to take a small group of our guys to an RAF Base near Plymouth, down on the South coast. We were to be equipped with Spitfires, and I was to be run up to a field near London and pick one up and fly it to Harrowbier, the RAF base. The other two pilots assigned to this project would follow. I wasn't told what I was to do with these Spit fighters; I would find that out when I got there. I had never flown one of these planes, but see one you've seen 'em all, but not this one! All American aircraft have the breaks on top of the rudder pedals, but the English put theirs as handgrips on the yoke, they also drive on the wrong side of the road. This takes a little getting used to, and is an engraved invitation to a ground loop if your not careful.

They dumped me in London early that morning, and one look up told you the war has started. The sky was crowded with airplanes, thousands of them. The high ones were leaving vapor trails so thick it caused a solid overcast. My form 5 says I took off at 9:45 that morning, about the time our guys were trying to scale the cliffs at Omaha beach. I flew across the flow of planes headed East to France and when I landed at Harrow bier, it appeared quite calm and quiet. Understand,

that's how the English ran their operations, no noise, no confusion, and not a lot of people milling around asking questions and offering advice, that's a description of an American control tower in operation. Once, I had the opportunity to observe in the tower during a scramble of their Beau fighters. It revealed how much we Americans had to learn about getting planes off the ground quickly and safely. We got it done, but they did it better. Of course, they have been at it a lot longer.

My two pilots flew their Spits in late that afternoon and all three of us were briefed on the mission we were to perform. We were to provide the means to communicate with the beachhead by carrying belly tanks of sensitive material, mostly photos I guessed, back and forth to England. This was to begin as soon as land could be cleared and steel panels laid to provide a landing strip. It had to be long enough to land and take off a Spitfire, which could do this in less space than our other fighters. In subsequent wars, this was a 'chopper' job. Sounds easy enough, but take my word for it, this was the most delicate bits of piloting I have ever been called upon to perform. For openers, I'm in a relatively strange aircraft. Second, they built the runway as short as the Spitfire would allow. Third, there were barrage balloons all over the place, tethered of course, which meant they had cables stretching to the ground, which swayed in the direction of the wind. Last, and enough, at the far end of the runway was the cliff, part of which the brave GI's scaled that first morning. Put all this together and there's no room for mistakes.

I took the first trip on D+4, or June 10th. The flight across the channel was breathtaking. The sea was covered with ships, so many it seemed you could walk across the Channel. Approaching the strip, I'm flying above the balloons, and getting into a position to descend to the runway. Strapped to my leg is a map layout of the balloons, their elevation (varying), and position of the cable hitches. You can't see the cables, but by the position of the balloons and knowing the force of the breeze off the ocean, I have some idea how much the cables are leaning. The decent was tricky! Not only weaving to avoid cables, the airspeed

had to be perfect to touch down within the first few yards of the mat, or risk running out of runway and finding yourself on the beach below. I remember something like this back in Charters Towers, Australia, a tricky landing in an A-20 then. We carried a tank; I have no idea what was in it if anything, which we dropped. The ground crew slapped on another, and we were on our way out of there, all within five minutes. My other two guys made the next two days run. My second and last trip was on the 13th. In a small way I got to participate in the invasion, and I'm proud of that!

20

Saving Lives Instead of Taking Them

The invasion changed the whole complexion of air operations in the ETO. No longer just dropping bombs on the enemy, we now had the added responsibility of supplying, as well as protecting our ground forces rapidly moving across the face of France. One of the first assignments given the 31st Transport Group was the evacuation of the wounded from Normandy. They were to be flown to several hospitals in England, as facilities in the invasion area were understandably limited.

After the 'currier' service with the Spitfires was no longer needed, I returned the Spits to their rightful owner and headed back to Grove, our home base, and climbed into C-47s, which we were to use in the evacuation effort. The strip in Normandy had been expanded by this time, which allowed us to set up a shuttle service across the Channel. The planning for this operation was superb. The co-ordination between the air element and the medical personnel on the ground and in the air with us was a model of efficiency; it went off like clockwork. Our Group had all of its C-47s engaged, perhaps twenty or so, in 'round robin' flights during daylight hours. We would fly in and get in line behind the others who were loading. A line of ambulances to the side, were waiting to drive up to each plane and load their patients.

An interesting note here, these patients were, for the most part, Americans, but not altogether. There were many German soldiers mixed in the group, if they were badly wounded they came with us to

the hospital. Some officer in charge of medical personnel, or something, informed me that I was required to search each of these Germans for guns and knives, with particular emphasis on pulling off their boots, if they had any, because that's where they stashed them. These were all litter cases, guys stretched out on a canvas cot, with one foot inside the Pearly Gates. This guy who suggested searching these poor souls, must have been over here too long. Even if they had something on them that could be viewed as a weapon, I don't believe these guys were thinking about highjacking this 47, where would they take it, Germany? If they lived that long! Orders or no orders, there was another overriding reason why I wasn't going to search anybody on that airplane. Have you ever smelled gangrene? If you have, you will sympathize with me and understand why we two pilots took a deep breath before boarding, ran up the aisle to the cockpit, and cranked up the engines so we could get some air blowing backward. If you haven't, you don't want to. I don't know how the nurses could stand it. What credit we must give these gals for doing what they did without bitching, moaning and complaining about the war. And they weren't drafted either!

On nearly every trip, one of the nurses would come forward, maybe when we were halfway there, and say "Captain, can you hurry up, I've got one going bad back here" "Lieutenant, we're going as fast as we can, I'll get you down in twelve minutes". The hospital would take charge of my 'passengers', a new medical team would hop aboard, and we were back in the air to do it all over. I made as many as 5 trips in one day. We never left anybody in an ambulance waiting for a ride 'home'.

21

Let's Live in France Awhile

We plied our trade in and out of the beachhead until hospitals were setup in Normandy capable of caring for our wounded. This was small farm country, like 10 acres of orchards mainly and apples mostly from which comes Calvados, aka apple cider. These small plots were usually square, and surrounded by what they called hedgerows. A hedgerow is a mound of earth about six feet high and covered with very thick bushes. It makes a great place to setup machine guns, mortars, even tanks. You couldn't see them 'til you got up next to them. Because of this 'defense favorable' terrain, the fighting was like hand to hand, plot by plot, and even though we had a million men in the beachhead by the end of June, it took the better part of July before we could break out of the containment and chase the retreating Germans across France.

When enough ground was secured, the whole of the Cotentin Peninsula, Cherbourg to St. Lo, the 313 Transport Squadron received orders to move over there, and take over an air strip near a little town called La Hay Du Puy. Patten's third army broke through the German line at St. Lo, and in short order threatened to surround the whole German defense force in Normandy, and would have, if Montgomery had taken Falaise, met Patten and closed the gap. But he didn't, and most of the German troops and armor slipped away. Even so, more than 100,000 were captured, and the race to Paris was on.

Our home in the hedgerows was a cozy little place, a row of tents clustered around the mess hall, and why not, the sole activity was eat, sleep, and fly. As our ground forces were sweeping across the country-

side, taking over strips left by the Luftwaffe, our job became one of flying in drums of fuel and oil for our fighters to use as they kept hot on the tail of the retreating Krauts. Enemy air opposition was sporadic at most, and I never saw a German fighter in the air. That threat was minimal. On the ground though, that was a different matter. By the time the Army gave us the location of a field to be supplied, and the time it took us to get there, you were never sure our side still owned the real estate, so caution was the word here. I would gingerly circle the field a couple of times looking for some friendly signs. There was supposed to be a certain panel laid out as a 'welcome' sign, but I would never rely on that alone. I wanted to see some GI's waving their arms in a friendly fashion before I sat down. I didn't want the guy holding the chair to be in the wrong uniform. And that did happen once, a little later on in Paris.

When Patton's Third Army got going, there was no stopping him. One thing might have, but we came to the rescue. The Third was moving so fast they were running out of maps, and put in a desperate call for some special maps they needed. Guess who flew over and dropped them to a grateful George Patton, why, the 313 Air Transport Squadron, of course, and we didn't charge him ten bucks for air-express mail.

Paris, that citadel of passion and power, a city that has lived on the edge of excitement through the last several centuries, whose four million citizens groveled under the boot of their Teutonic master for the past four years, was at last to be liberated. No longer would they have to get their ticket validated by Der Fuhrer to visit the Lourve

As a military objective, it didn't mean much. The greatest fear the Allies had was that the madman in Berlin would order the city destroyed before we could stop him, and he did! There are many statues of old warriors atop horses in Paris, almost every 'Place' has one, but there is a glaring omission, the one guy that saved the city from becoming a brick pile, General von Choltitz. At the end, he refused to carry out Hitler's order to destroy the city, and surrendered it to the Allies intact.

Back at La Hay Du Puy, the long awaited word came, resupply the airport at Paris. I was standing in the front of the line of guys who wanted to take this flight. I wound up second best to the CO, Maj. Mit Evans, but it was still quite a privilege to be the second scheduled Allied airplane to land, 30 seconds behind Mitt, at Le Bourget, the field Lindberg immortalized in 1927. This flight took place on August 30, four days after deGaulle took his bow entering the gates of Paris. Even then, the roundup was still going on, some German die-hards refusing to go quietly. We, Mit and I, didn't know this, but the airport at Le Bourget was still in German hands, so it was a big surprise when we taxied up to the hanger and were directed to park by the Luftwaffe guys who viewed captivity a better option than following the losers out of town. They hopped right to it and unloaded our cargo of gas and oil.

My co-pilot and I headed for the gate that opened to the Paris streets, and encountered a 1st Army jeep going south. "You guys want a lift into town?" We jumped off at a 'Place de something or other', and looked around with awe, the place was a madhouse. The gentry soon spotted us and we were swept up in this revelry. Somebody gave us two bottles of champagne and put us in flower carts, the kind that was pushed around by a bicycle attached to the rear. This action started a parade down a street, which led to a bistro jammed, packed with happy Frenchmen, Frenchwomen too, let's not forget them. A lady came over to us with an invitation to sample some real absinth. She owned the joint where all the celebrating was centered. She lived upstairs above the bar, a nicely furnished apartment with a balcony overlooking the Square below. With a stem glass of yellow absinth in hand, we stepped out through the French doors, looked down to the street, 50 feet from a truckload of German soldiers all with their hands in the air. With a grin and a salute with our champagne glasses, we shouted "Auf Wiedersehen. They all looked up with a blank stare.

I have returned to Paris several times since that day, but was never able to find that place again, but it still remains an unsurpassed mem-

ory in my life. Shortly after the liberation of Paris, our Squadron was ordered to move out of the hedgerows of Normandy and relocate in the ancient city of Chartres. We moved into a large Chateau on the grounds of a landing strip the Krauts built, and there were plenty of them still around, this time carrying a broom instead of a rifle. We put these guys to work keeping the grounds clean. Some of them spoke English, and we delighted in talking with them about their view of the war. To a man, they all said they were drafted into the army, and had no use for Hitler and all the rest of the Generals. This makes you want to laugh, and we did, but can you blame them? They were the lucky ones, and all they were trying to do was make it easy on themselves. Chartres is a short jeep ride to Paris, and we took many opportunities to make the trip. We country boys from America got our eyes full of Paris in the raw, a sight to behold indeed. These people had been 'locked up' for so long, they acted like a bunch of dogs that just realized somebody left the kennel door open. I speak with reference to Montmart, the Latin Quarter and the raunchier parts of the City. How people were behaving down around the Ritz, I had no idea, We, country boys that we are, preferred the gin mills and nudie joints in the Paris of Toulouse-Lautrec and Henry Miller. Booze was plentiful, if not cheap, but food was not. Headquarters didn't care where you drank, but eating in a Paris restaurant was discouraged. It was an attempt to save food supplies for the Parisians. Paris was without heat most of the time, and when you got cold you stayed that way, at least until you found somebody to 'bundle' with. Remember, I told you these were Country boys, and 'Bundling' was a favorite pastime in the country back home.

On one occasion we had the Doc, our flight surgeon, with us in the jeep. When we hit the fringes of the hotspots in Monmart, Doc pulled up to the curb in front of a bar just as six shots rang out from inside. No mistaking that sound, a GI 45cal side arm. People, mostly GI's, began streaming out the door and hightailing it up the street. Doc jumped out of the jeep, went inside for not more than a minute, came

out on the double, jumped back in the jeep and said "The guy's dead, nothing I can do. Let's get out of here" Doc was in there long enough to find out what happened, and told us. Paris those days were full of combat troops taking a few days off. All of them were armed and mean, and I'm not making excuses for them, just telling it like it was so you will get the picture of how war changes those who face death, or worse, everyday, sloshing through the mud or riding on a tank. There are no 'nice guys' in this business; they are all killers. If they were anything else, they wouldn't be here. They don't reveal that when you talk to them, but they are, and one of them was in that bar that night. A black GI struck a white GI, knocked him to the floor, and took six slugs in the chest. The outcome was always pretty much the same; the Military Police (MP) arrive, say "Did anybody see this?" and the only reply was by the lone bartender "I had my back turned". MPs then, "Call the wagon and get this body out of here"

A couple of weeks of this sort of behavior, and things returned to a semblance of order, within the military I mean. Paris was no longer an option for pent-up GI's, the Generals kept them on their leash.

22

Stop Shooting at Me—The War's Almost Over!

So, it came time for us to move on. Orders came down, 'Move back to England', and once again we were in the comforting confines of Grove, our HQ airbase.

Col Allen, Commanding Officer of the 31st Group gave me command of HQ squadron, which consisted of all personnel of Group Headquarters, including himself. We had no airplanes but flew with any of the four squadrons who did, which leads to this tale of thrills that happened to me while working in this capacity. One day I got a call to take a C-47 to London and pick up 3 Colonels and their assistants and fly them to Brussels, Belgium. I met the Colonels at the airport and at introductions I discovered they were Infantry guys, not too familiar with riding sidesaddle in the back of a Goony-bird. Besides that, somebody decided to throw on some sides of beef since I had room in back. Obviously the Colonels didn't object so they made a butcher shop out of my airplane, but who was I to complain.

The weather that day was lousy as usual, just above minimums for visual flight rules. The solid overcast hung at about 500 ft, with a nice little breeze of 30ks blowing up the alley from Spain. There was no briefing to speak of, but I was fully aware that the Germans still held Holland, and Holland would be in my sights if I was blown too far North of my intended track But Nobody mentioned the Germans still holding Dunkirk, a pocket of Krauts who held out till the war ended, and Dunkirk was directly in my flight path.

To cross the Channel at 300 ft you only have the spray off the waves to judge the wind by. You guess ‘25, 30, 35ks’ and ‘crab’ your heading into the direction of the wind, and hope you are right. As soon as land shows up out the front window, you can make the proper adjustment in heading, but until then, have you crabbed too much, or too little, only identifying your landfall will tell. Today I was right on the mark, just a few miles South of Dunkirk. The coast along there is devoid of landmarks, being mostly sand dunes and low hills, so the prudent thing to do was turn left and run up the coast a bit until I could positively identify my position. Dunkirk had a pier built out from the beach that easily identified the town. I was flying at 300 feet just outside the breakers, coming right up the coast straight and level doing 130 mph, a shooting gallery; you’d better believe it! My co-pilot was one of the new guys not long out of flying school, who probably thought he was home free by getting in a Transport Group instead of the right seat in a B-17. He soon found out that no matter what you fly, if it’s anywhere near the enemy, you could expect the thrills that come with this business. I thought he was going to jump in my lap, “Captain, they’re shooting at us!” I didn’t see the first tracer lob over the co-pilot’s window because I was in the left seat, but he no more than said that than I had that old Gooney bird headed straight down and then cork-screwing out to sea with wide open throttles ‘They’ were firing what appeared to be a Bofors Gun, those same old red baseballs I alluded to before, If you see ’em you can dodge ’em. There was no time to yell “Hold on!”, so my ground-pounding Colonels in the rear seats, got a ‘D-ticket’ Disney ride, which I’m sure they thought would be their last. I could just imagine their conversation back there, “Douglas, I knew we should have stayed on the ground”. “Have you got a spare uniform in your B-4 bag, George?”

I still didn’t get it. Why are the British shooting at me? I thought something was wrong with my markings. I could think of no other reason to open up on me, so the only thing to do was turn back to England and find out.

The first strip I came to was home to Dave Shilling's Group of P-51s, one of the most celebrated fighter Groups in the UK. It was a soggy day, and so was the turf out in front of his Operations bldg. When I clamped the breaks, the wheels chewed a path through his beautiful grass. When I saw that. I thought, sure as hell, I was in for an 'ass chewing' by the Colonel. It might have helped to have my three colonel passengers standing beside me when Dave drove up in his jeep. All he said was "Welcome, I'm Dave Shilling, how about a cup of coffee?" You meet some great guys in this business.

After coffee, apologies, warnings about Dunkirk, good conversation and Dave's smiling promise to go 'shoot 'em up' over there, I bundled my passengers back on board, and we were off for Brussels, this time giving wide berth to Dunkirk. That was the last time anybody shot at me in this mans war.

23

We won't be home for Christmas, but we'll Have One Hellova New Year's Eve Party

The end of 1944 was drawing near. The weather was changing from cold to colder and the war was becoming a little more boring, now that the really big events, the invasion, Paris, the demise of the Luftwaffe, were history, and there was talk of being home by Christmas. Those with that frame of mind were soon jolted out of it by Hitler and his gang of maniacs who, on the 16th of December, crashed through the Ardennes forest with 24 Divisions, led by 8 Panzer (armored) Divisions. The initial assault was appalling; German soldiers masquerading as Americans, the massacre of prisoners by the SS at Malmedy, the staggering casualties suffered by the Allies, the “Battered Bastards of Bastone” spelled the death throes of the 1000-year Reich the madman in Berlin had promised.

The repercussion of this action was felt everywhere, even in my cozy little office back in England. Several days after this mess started, I was called into Col Allen's HQ, with the other Squadron COs, where we were told to select some of our men to be transferred to the Infantry. They were to be issued a rifle and sent to France to beef up the line the Germans had dented. These guys in my outfit, clerk-typists, auto mechanics, cooks, they didn't know one end of a rifle from the other.

My quota was 3 GI's. I couldn't pick 'em, I let Sgt Locicero, the top Sarge, do the picking, but I was the guy that had to tell them. It was

the hardest thing I had to do in all my days in the Army. I had to look these guys in the eye and tell them they pulled the Brass Ring. One by one, and this happened twice within a week, they took it like soldiers and nobody asked "Why me, Captain?" Thank God, if they had, I wouldn't have known what to say.

The bad weather had the Air forces grounded, so the Krauts and their tanks had a field day up until Christmas morning when the fog lifted and Santa Claus left the GI's all the P-47s, P-51s, Lightning's, Marauders, you name it they needed to blow the Germans back to where they came from. The six guys I sentenced to the Infantry? They never made it out of England; thank Heaven!

We didn't let a war in France dampen our spirits for a long planned New Years Eve party. The 31st Group slickered all the other organizations in the UK; we got the Glen Miller Band to play our party. What a coup! This was the small Band within Millers Big Band that played at weddings, divorces, Bar Mitzvahs, anywhere they could make a pound, and all the 'big name boys' performing; Johnny Desmond, Tex Beneke, Mel Powell. We had a Band! We had the booze! We sent C-47s to Scotland and France on supply runs for Scotch and Champagne. We needed dance partners! Nothing can stop the Army Air Corps, not even a lack of women. So we sent a fast talking, baby-faced 2nd lieutenant to Oxford, about 15 miles North, to 'contract' for several truck loads of WACs, WAAFs, or any other females wishing for booze and balloons on New Years eve. The 'contract' was with the Commandant of the District Women's Army Corps, and it called for the 'girls' to be returned to Oxford by 0200, Jan 1, 1945. Our fast talker said, "Of course Madam, you have my solemn word on that". One look at this guy and you could believe him.

WE have the Band! WE have the Booze! WE have the Women! Now let's have a party!

It was the 'mother of all parties'. It started quite low key, about like a Junior High Prom where all line up at each end of the hall, according

to gender, and eyeball each other. Eventually Nature takes it's course, the ice melts and the party begins.

Col Allen had invited Vivian Leigh (aka Scarlet O'Hara) a few days before. What can you say about Vivian Leigh? She's great! The Miller Band! What can you say about a sound like that? Great" The Booze? What you say about the booze? "Great" The women! What can you say about the women? After a few drinks, "Great" The band got drunk, the balloons came down and all the WACs hadn't been accounted for by noon the next day. The Col was catching hell from the Madam WAC, and the fast talking 2nd lieutenant hasn't been seen since.

24

Winding Down

The last six months of my stay over here was spent more like a rich tourist than a GI in the Army, with frequent trips around the UK; Paris even, on leave. The frantic workload through the end of the year slowed up a bit after we jumped the Rhein. The Wehrmacht was in a steady retreat all across the board, and as a consequence, the Air Force changed targets and emphasized bombing the oil industry out of business. We still ran oil and gas supplies into advanced positions, but not as frequently. It seems we were called upon to fly VIP around more than war material. Our Group flew the whole Glen Miller Band of the AEF, minus Glen, of course, to Paris where they were to put on a show. Glen decided to ride over with a friend of his who was flying a Norseman, designated a UC64 I believe. I flew one of these kites some month's back, when I was ferrying aircraft. It was built for the Canadian Bush, seated 5, but could carry 10, and we did that more than once. It had a high-lift wing with a gas tube sticking out the bottom containing a stick/float to indicate your fuel supply. This was no hi-tech machine, and on top of that, it was a ground-looping mother. No one will ever know what happened to them because there was no radio contact; they just disappeared. Could German aircraft have attacked them? Not likely, as the only Luftwaffe planes, and few at that, were some ME-262s who were strictly interested in attacking bomber formations. If a 262 attacked them, they would have called for help. There is another explanation. A V-1, Buzz bomb, could have hit them. These things were coming over at an altitude about where Miller and

his pilot were flying. There would have been no chance to pick up a mike; they might not even have seen it. Could be!

Other memorable flights I took in those last days were a couple of trips into Germany. The one to Nuremburg was the most startling. It was common knowledge that “Bomber” Harris was on a vindictive path of destruction regarding German cities. The US saw no point in this, even considered it counterproductive, as it merely stiffened enemy resistance. But Harris, head of British Bomber Command, got his way. The fact that he knew the method was a failure before when Hitler tried to plow the British under by saturation bombing was never in his mind. So, obviously Harris was delivering retribution, taking it right to the German people. The RAF these days was dropping 20,000 lb bombs, and they didn’t care where they landed, as long as it landed in town where Germans would be reminded of what they did to London. The V-1 and the V-2 rocket are in the same bag. Nothing more than vindictiveness, exercises in merciless killing without any value to the nations cause. I suppose this happens in all wars where the near vanquished strike out one last time, and the conquerors demand retribution. Well let me tell you, Nuremburg was “retributed” and then some! From the air, approaching the city from 20 miles out, the skyline looked quite normal, many high-rise buildings forming a core, surrounded by lower structures to complete the picture of any large city one usually sees on a postcard. The view from atop was quite different; there were no ‘guts’ in any of the buildings, they were all hollow shells, four walls surrounding nothing but rubble. It was horrifying. Surely no one lived through this, and very few did.

Munich fared somewhat better. Mass destruction didn’t visit this city like some others. Perhaps Harris and his boys couldn’t bring themselves to blow up all those breweries in the beer capitol of the world, they might have considered that sacrilegious.

25

Homeward Bound

The sun worked it's way into Spring, the war moved on into Germany, Roosevelt died and preparations were underway to move the troops back to the ZI (Zone of Interior aka Home) Orders to ship me to Los Angeles came through in June, just the right time to take a delightful weekend at the Bell Inn, Hurley-on Thames, a stagecoach stop in the days of Cromwell, a place fairly dripping with charm. The English, apparently, don't believe in bringing their countryside into the modern age. People centuries ago weren't as tall as we are today, so, in many cases, we stoop when we pass through the doorways. You crack your head occasionally, but would you have it any other way? I wouldn't!

We were scheduled to sail on the Queen Elizabeth, sister ship to the Queen Mary, floating on the river Clyde near Glasgow. She was to carry 15,000 GI's and officers; the officers crammed into staterooms, the GI's sharing sleeping bags on the decks, three to a space. Each guy was entitled to eight hours in the pad, if he wanted to use it. In my cabin were six captains, three Air Corps, two infantry and one who commanded a company of black soldiers in the Transportation corps. These guys were the truck drivers that fed our Army on the move. They got no recognition, medals or thanks, just an occasional chest full of 45 slugs for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. One of them in that gang made up a lot of ground though, by bringing his Captain several thousand dollars each night that he won in the worlds biggest crap game up on the top deck.

The game started even before we made a wake. The goal in most of those thousands of GI's on board, was to go home rich, or broke, and it didn't matter which, nobody was holding back. As in all crap games, the lucky ones hang in there, and the 'feeders' drop by the wayside and dream about what might have been, like the French planter in 'South Pacific'. By the third night out the game had reached gigantic proportions, and on the morning of the fourth day, there was a mysterious order by the ships company, for all passengers to go to their assigned sleeping space and stand by. There was a head count underway. It seems, the night before, one of the players was caught using passing dice, which is dice that can't throw sevens. You have to be quick at switching these 'ringers' into the game, he wasn't. "Are you sure, Mario?" "I just saw Vito under a lifeboat cover, counting his money". After the headcount, it was concluded that the guy was back there trying to find the Titanic.

We steamed into New York in the morning of the fifth day at sea, to the Welcome Home signs waving on all the little boats weaving in and out of the water sprays from a dozen fireboats in the harbor. The first thing that greeted us at the bottom of the gangplank on pier 90 was a long table piled high with $1/2$ -pint cartons of milk. Standing behind the table, handing out the cartons, were the Red Cross ladies in their uniforms, looking at us through eyes that transformed us into little boys whose vision of heaven was a bottle of milk. If these 'mothers' would only admit it, a Jack Daniels would have made ten times the points. But that's women, God love 'em. A boatload of battle weary GI 'Sad Sacks' have but one thing on their mind, "Got milk?" Get real!

It's one hellova long way from New York to Los Angeles, particularly when the accommodations don't even look third class to a cow. Like the old Lucky Strike Green that went to war, the modern Pullman car just up and disappeared for no reason whatsoever. Some Harvard grads designed some brand new ones with one object in mind, see how many GI's can be crammed into one car. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. They double and triple decked the things, and go easy

on putting toilets in, that just takes up valuable space. One at each end of a car will do, after all, there's only 200 men to the car.

Two guys pumping a handcar could have made it faster. It was a ten-day trip the way we were flying down the track, one State per day. We were about halfway home, somewhere in the State of Kansas; I think it was a town called Grinnell where we stopped long enough to get a newspaper announcing the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. The rest of the trip to the coast, well, uneventful compared to these recent events. Fort MacArthur was at the end of the track, and after an hour or so 'debriefing', I was allowed to leave with a shiny new brass lapel pin affectionately called a 'Ruptured Duck', and a piece of paper in my pocket proclaiming "America Thanks You".