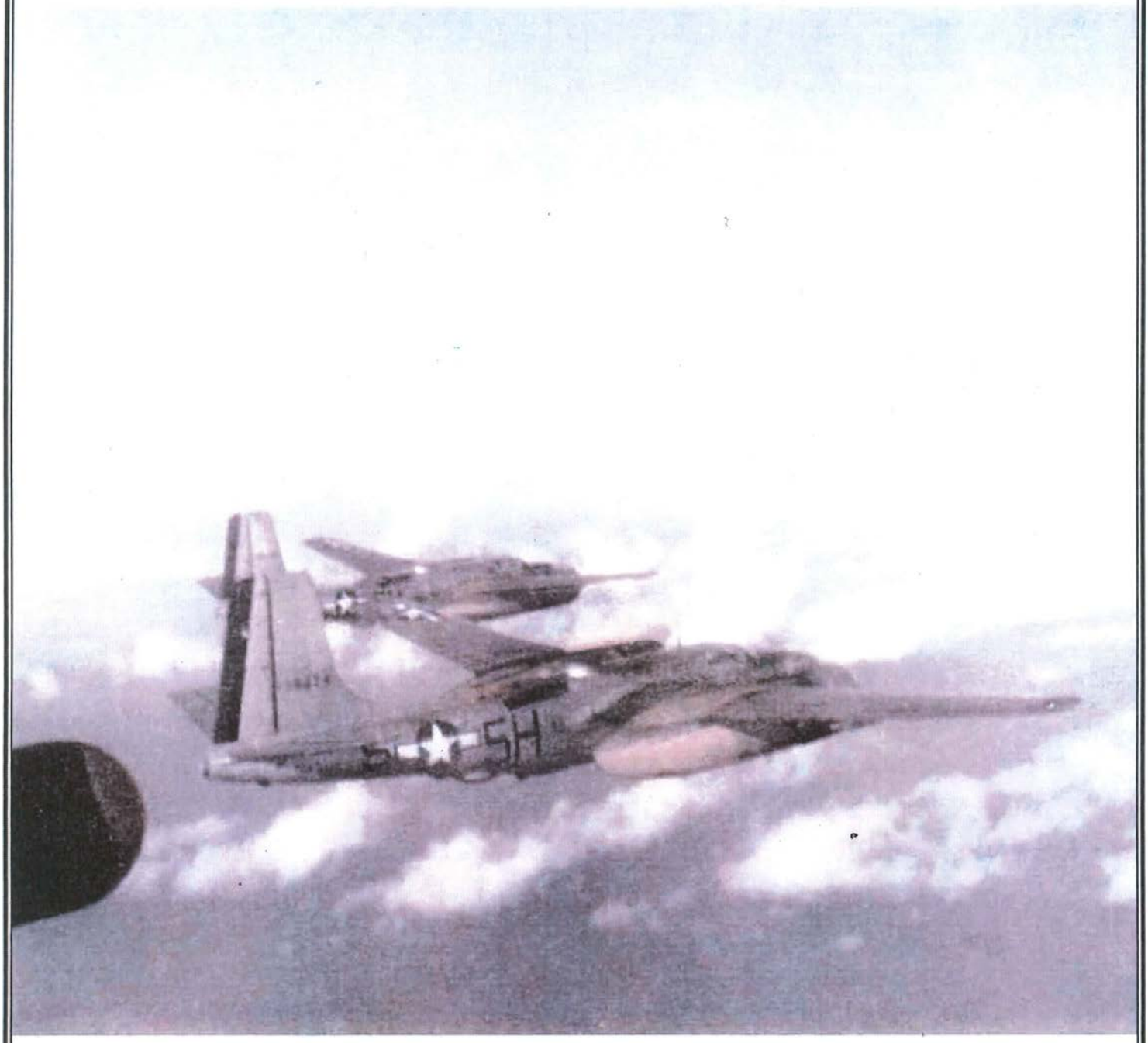
PILLARS IN THE SKY
WORLD WAR II FROM THE AIR



by
Jim Phillips

Illustrations

Over the Atlantic Ocean on our trip home. Taken with my Kodak, fixed-lens camera. ..... Front Cover
Home in Korea 3
PT-22 Sketch 21
BT-13 Sketch 25
AT-6 Sketch 29
October 30, 1942 33
AT-17 Sketch 39
B-25 Sketch 47
A-20 Sketch 51
A-26 Combat Formation Sketch 71
Photocopy of letter by General Vandenberg and 9th Air Force Patch 83
A-26 display at March Air Force Base honoring the 416th Bomb Group. Photo by nephew, Jack Phillips. 99
Author with great-grandson, Andrew Brooks, at the Travis Air Force Base Air Museum. Photo by grandson, Jason Brooks. ..... Inside Back Cover

Foreword

This manuscript is written as a family document and it is dedicated to my wife, my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren. It is written for only two reasons: First, because I have enjoyed reviewing those amazing war years in my old age and wanted to record them before memory faded entirely. Second, because I thought that the following generations might appreciate what it was like to survive World War II.

The years between 1942 and 1946 probably were the most dramatic of my life; being full of action, adventure, and periods of sheer terror. The four years immediately preceding my service provided a period of preparation and I have touched also on that time.

Just before I entered the U.S. Army Air Corps, I discovered a passage in Psalms, which sustained me whenever I needed reassurance (which proved to be often). It is *Psalms 139:9-10 (King James Version)*[1].

I want to thank my grandson, Jason Brooks, who volunteered to type this manuscript.

I also thank my friend, Rob Ameele of the University of California, at Irvine, who inspired me to write about my World War II experiences (this happened in 1982 – sometimes inspiration takes a bit of time to sink in).

[1] "*If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

Chapter I

Storm Clouds

In a way, World War II started for me in the spring of 1938. I was in our front yard, taking a break from mowing our rather large lawn. It was a warm day and the old push-mower was not easy to move. As I sat daydreaming the time away, a Japanese student walked into the yard. It was easy to conclude that he was a student, because he wore the typical black cap and uniform required at the Japanese schools. He appeared to be about the same age as I was – seventeen at that time.

He approached me shyly, with an uncertain smile on his face. As he came near, he bowed and introduced himself. I returned his bow and must have displayed some puzzlement. He came right to the point and said, "I teach you Japanese and you teach me English, okay?"

We agreed and started in immediately. Sitting on a grassy slope, we identified every tree in the yard and all of the garden plots in my dad's "lower forty" (probably no more than a half-acre). After perhaps a half-hour of talking, during which we established a quick rapport, Aoki (I don't remember his real name) announced that he had to depart, but that he would return in exactly one week.

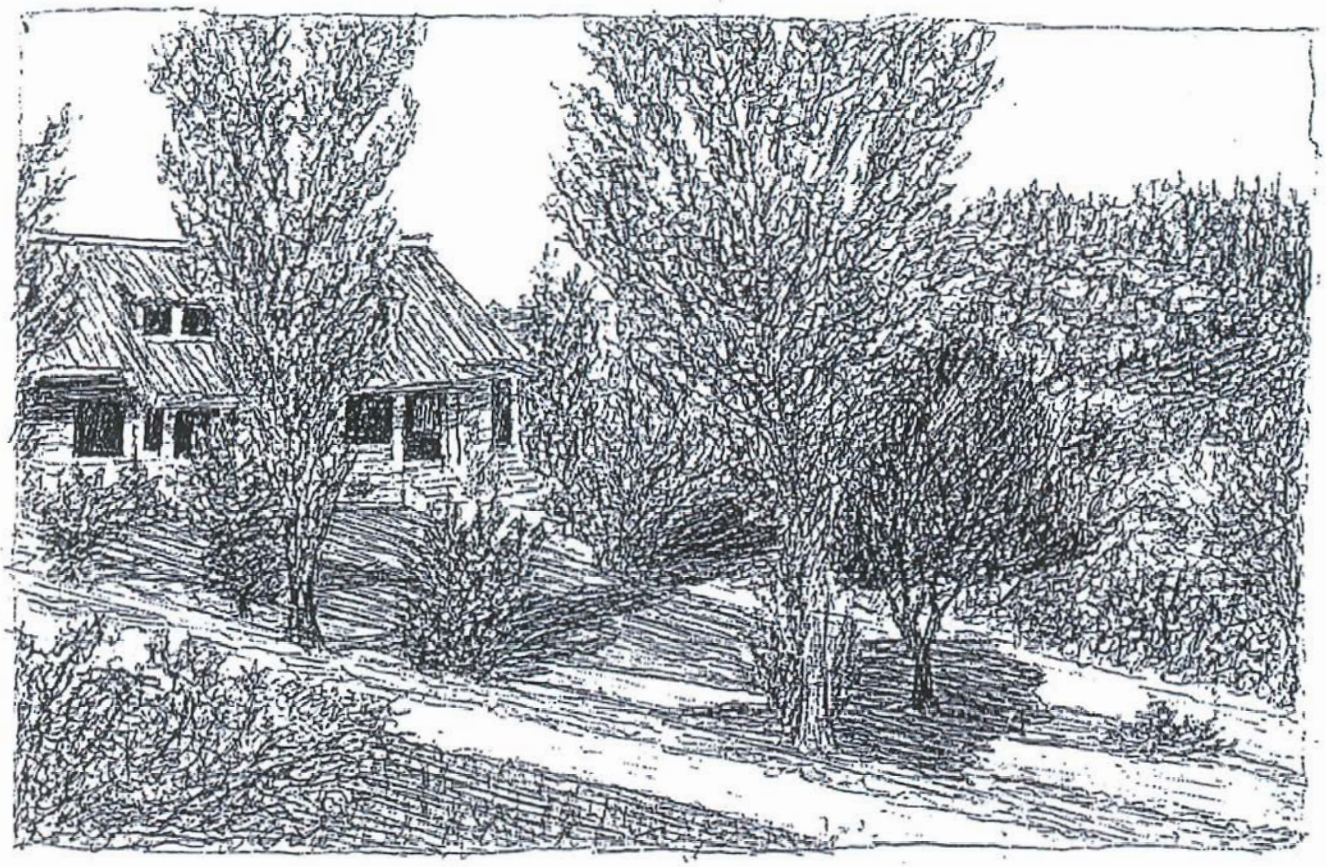
Aoki showed up right on time the following week and we resumed our lessons. After perhaps five minutes, I noticed that he appeared troubled. I asked him what was wrong, whereupon he suddenly started to sob uncontrollably. I put my hand on his shoulder and asked if I had said something wrong. Between his sobs, he said (and after sixty-two years, this memory is vividly clear), "Oh, no, Jim, it is nothing which you have said. It is that I cry because some day my country will fight your country and we cannot remain friends."

After apologizing profusely, Aoki stood, bowed, and walked away. I was absolutely stunned, wondering what had prompted Aoki's outburst. What had drawn him to our yard in the first place? Why did he deliver this particular message? I never got an answer. And I never saw Aoki again.

We lived in a Presbyterian mission compound, in Korea, of about 16 families. Approximately four miles away, there was a Methodist mission of four homes. In between, the missionaries had established a cooperative hospital, seminary, Bible institute, and schools from grade one through four years of college. Our compound included a school, which served missionary kids from both China and other parts of Korea. About 100 students attended classes from first through twelfth grades, and a dormitory housed students from out-of-town. This was in the City of Pyengyang (now called Pyongyang, the capitol of North Korea).

My Mother arrived in Korea as a single woman in 1909, and my Father, a year later – the year during which Japan took over Korea as a protectorate. They were married in 1911. There were five of us children, all born in our home in Korea.

Growing up in Korea was an unforgettable experience. I think that I first became really aware of the Japanese presence when I was about 10 years old. My Mother was instrumental in bringing a small group of Japanese women to knowledge of Christianity, and as a result, they came to our home for Bible study and tea or sometimes lunch or dinner. Many of these women were wives of public officials and they would arrive in fancy limousines.



KOREA HOME

The Japanese control of Korea was, at the same time, benevolent and exploitative. They built a massive and efficient railroad system. Manufacturing and mining created thousands of jobs. Schools (particularly 1st – 12th grade schools) cropped up everywhere. On the other hand, Korean workers were paid miserably and poverty was rampant. The schools had a strictly government-controlled curriculum. Some Koreans chafed at the lack of any freedom and there were periodic and bloody uprisings, which had no chance of success.

The Christian mission effort in Korea was extremely successful because it emphasized training natives to become ministers, teachers, doctors, and nurses. The Korean response to the gospel was tremendous, for it provided a spiritual freedom, which they could not experience socially or physically. As a result, the Korean church today is perhaps one of the strongest in the world.

My parents both taught in Bible institutes and my Father spent a great deal of time traveling to the far reaches of North Korea as an advisor to new churches – much as the Apostle Paul traveled through Asia Minor. As time progressed, the Japanese became more and more restrictive, until finally almost all travel by foreigners ceased.

As we children grew up, we became more and more aware of the Japanese military presence. A military academy was created not far from our compound. We often saw Japanese troop trains going north to Manchuria. These packed trains used the main South-North tracks, which passed within a quarter-mile of our place. We boys would often be right at the tracks as we went to skate on the small river in the winter months, so we became quite aware of the growing "China Incident" as the Japanese called their invasion of China. Also, a large flight-training base was established east of the city. As I became a teenager, it seemed that the Japanese pilots were using our house as a mythical target. A pattern seemed to take shape, wherein they would fly directly over our place, always coming from south to north. As time progressed, they flew lower

and lower. I often imagined their grinning faces as they teased the foreign devils below! I also tried to visualize how our house must have looked from their vantage point.

I became increasingly interested in aircraft design, noticing the change in the Japanese craft. At first we only saw lumbering bi-planes, but in time a sleeker look took over. Later, a few low-wing planes with fixed landing gear showed up. Finally, just before we left in the summer if 1938, we saw planes with "pants" and fairing over the wheels and struts. These aircraft were obviously much faster than their predecessors.

During my last three years in Korea I also developed an interest in American aircraft design. Using the well-equipped shops at the Christian College, I built several rather crude model airplanes of solid wood, using photos in "*The Saturday Evening Post*" and "*National Geographic*" as a guide. This also gave me a notion of how aviation was progressing in my own country, including the innovative retractable landing gears found on a few aircraft.

In those same years we became acutely aware of Japanese pressure. The phrase, "Asia for the Asians" became quite repetitive. My Father could not travel by train without being accompanied by a Japanese "Secret Service Agent" who grilled him about his intentions and motives. Dark hints of foreign spies were heard. Furthermore, the Japanese started a destructive campaign against the Korean church, using a policy to coerce all Koreans into attendance at the Japanese Shinto shrines. What started as a rather mild persecution became intense and brutal following my departure from the country.

I have fond memories of Korea. I covered a great deal of it by auto, rail, bus, and bicycle. I met some wonderful Koreans who were inspiring by their faith and graciousness. A few Japanese also stood out. I always admired their industry and sense of design. Their homes were always meticulously kept and their gardens, a place to promote peaceful contemplation. I came to see this as a startling contrast to the military sabre-rattling of the day.

I have often wondered about Aoki. What might have become of him? Could his prophetic comment have taken him into the military? Could he possibly have seen the war years from the cockpit, as I did? Could he have shot at my brother as he piloted B-29's over Japan in 1945? (See *Rain of Fire*, by Col. Charles L. Phillips, Jr., Ret., USAF). There is no way to know the answers to any of those questions, still I cannot help but wonder.

Chapter II

Day of Infamy

The broad Pacific Ocean spread out before us as we left Japan behind. My friend and I stood in the bow of the ship, looking ahead to Hawaii. Our family had come by train to Pusan on the southern tip of Korea, then to Japan by night ferry. Another train had taken us to Tokyo and then we went by taxi to Yokohama, where we boarded the "U.S. Grant".

Looking back to the northwest, I took my last look at Japan. Although I did not know it then, I had also seen Korea for the last time. Little did I know that the "Land of the Morning Calm" would become once again a site for war and be torn asunder by actions of Russia, China, and the United States. If I had possessed a crystal ball, I would have cried, but at the time, I looked ahead with youthful anticipation to life in the USA.

Missionaries received yearlong furloughs about every seven or eight years, so the timing of this last trip (the last of five) across the Pacific was not ideal for me. I had to leave all my friends behind and take my last year of high school in the States, then go on to college.

When I entered Pasadena Junior College for my last year of high school in the fall of 1938, I sensed that the world was changing. I was encouraged to take ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps, run by the U.S. Army) and did so with pleasure. Although the classes were somewhat dull and the marching tedious, playing war with real guns (no ammunition) in the sandy arroyos at the base of the Sierra Madre Mountains was fun. It was like being a Boy Scout with a gun!

At this time I became aware (for the second time) of a man named Hitler. (One of our missionary families had relatives in Germany. Their oldest daughter

had visited Germany in the summer of 1937, returning with glowing reports of how this great man was revitalizing the nation.)

One morning all classes were suddenly cancelled and the student body was called to a school meeting in the gymnasium. We sat with great uncertainty as this ranting voice in German shouted at us. It went on for some time and then was cut off. An interpreter then reported the message in English, although in a much calmer voice. Even as a young 17 year old, I remember being chilled by the message. It was full of hate and threat. Even then, this "great leader" sounded like a madman. Most of the tirade was directed at England, France, and Poland. Later, when we heard more about the alliance of the "Axis Powers" of Germany, Italy, and Japan, I was reminded of Aoki's comment and became more concerned about the future – what would it hold for my country?

It was at this time that I had my first experience with flying. My dad was driving my two older sisters and myself on Foothill Boulevard somewhere east of Pasadena. As we rounded a curve, my dad said, "Well lookey there!" Without another word, he turned abruptly into this sandy, run-down private airport where two or three dusty planes stood in front of a sheet-iron hanger. A grinning fellow came out of a small office, whereupon Dad started his negotiation. Could the four of us be taken on a short flight? What would it cost? The pilot looked at us and allowed as how we would be overloaded, but yes, he could take us up. Upon hearing that Dad was a preacher, he offered a price that couldn't be refused.

It was a short ride, but what a flight. We five somehow squeezed into the four-place Stinson monoplane (highly illegal). I don't remember having a seatbelt either. We made a bumpy takeoff and the immediate feeling of freedom entranced me as the wheels left the ground. I also was taken by the view as we climbed. But then old Dad did his thing. With a big grin, he turned to the pilot and innocently asked, "Can you do a loop-the-loop for us?"

The pilot got this evil grin on his face and abruptly nosed the ship for the ground. There was no time to react. One second we were looking almost directly straight down and then we were shoved down into our seats as the plane came out of its dive and started toward the sun. About this time, the world as I had known it disappeared completely! After what seemed like minutes, the horizon reappeared, totally upside-down. And then we were diving straight down again. At the bottom, old Smiley leveled the plane and then said, "Don't ever tell anyone that I did such a thing with an overloaded plane!"

We were soon on the ground again. The whole flight could not have lasted over 20 minutes. I noticed that my sisters looked rather green and my stomach felt sort of queasy. But Dad had a triumphant flush on his face as he gladly paid the pilot. Later, experience tells me that the Lord, Himself, watched over a family of fools that day!

In other respects, my year at Pasadena was most uneventful. As a missionary kid familiar with a student body of 100, I was lost among the thousands at PJC. The only thing that really impressed me was watching the best athlete I have ever seen. He was a black fellow named Jackie Robinson. Unknown to many, he was a true all-around athlete during his high school and first two college years at PJC. He lettered in basketball, baseball, football, and track. I do believe that he could have been a professional in any one of those sports. One of my most vivid memories of that time was watching Jackie run 104 yards for a touchdown in the Rose Bowl during a JC championship game. Although I watched him perform in every sport, that was the highlight of his achievements for me.

My folks sailed back to Korea in July of 1939, leaving me as a green 18 year old in the care of relatives in New Jersey until I entered Wheaton College in Illinois in September. My brief stay at Wheaton (fall of 1939 to February, 1942) was scholastically uneventful. It was there that I chased a beautiful red haired girl until she caught me! We became engaged on Valentine's Day in 1941.

My roommate was a kid that I had grown up with in Korea. We both played soccer at Wheaton and he later switched to basketball. I sort of majored in extracurricular activities and my grades reflected those interests.

My folks were forced out of Korea in 1940 and my dad took up an interim pastorship in Kentucky. Although I did not see them often, it was a pleasure having my folks closer. In the spring of 1941, I signed up for a government program, which proved to be fortuitous later on.

All over the U.S., college students were enrolling in the Civilian Pilot Training Program. I was influenced by the fact that my brother, Charlie, had enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Since I was under 21, my folks had to approve of my involvement in flying. I have often wondered how they felt at the time, since flying was still considered somewhat dangerous.

I looked forward with great anticipation to this new experience. A small airport northwest of the college was used for the program. Side-by-side two-seater Aeronca aircraft were used for training. These planes had a 65 HP engine and cruised at about 85 MPH (the best horsepower-to-speed ratio of any aircraft I flew). Jack Jaeneke was our instructor and we called him "Smilin' Jack" after the comic strip character of that day. Although he was an excellent instructor, I never flew with him without alcohol fumes permeating the cabin.

I soon learned that a properly trimmed aircraft was a completely stable platform, which could glide safely to earth should power be lost. Before we soloed, we got the feel of stalls and spins. (A plane stalls when it slows to a speed at which it stops flying and starts to sink, sometimes rather abruptly. Ideally, an aircraft stalls a mere second before it's wheels touch the runway.) Although the spins were dramatic, I found that a plane spinning nose-down to the ground could easily be brought out of the spin and in full control.

My first solo flight came after about eight hours of dual instruction. Since my takeoffs and landings had gone well, I only felt mildly vulnerable flying alone, but this feeling quickly dissipated.

My most vivid memory of that time came on my first cross-country flight. It was a simple trip, following a railroad and highway perhaps 100 miles to the west and then returning. We flew dual, with Jack pointing out such details as how we could determine wind direction and its effect on our track over the ground. One of the important aspects of our training was practicing "forced landings". The instructor would gently pull the throttle back to idle and announce, "Forced landing." We were expected to use our best judgment in picking out the best possible site for a landing and start a glide pattern toward that goal. The instructor would always take over at about 500 feet and return the aircraft to cruising altitude.

As we neared our destination on this particular trip, I was looking ahead for our turn-around point. We were flying at about 2,000 feet. Suddenly, Jack pulled the throttle and announced, "Forced landing." I looked about and saw no promising landing spot. The terrain included a number of wooded plots, the one highway, and a few cornfields with two-foot high stalks, which would catch the landing gear and flip the plane on its back. A bit ahead I found a hayfield that I thought we could glide to. The field had been mowed and there were many rows of hay bales, which filled the 40-acre plot. It looked like our plane would fit between two rows, so I established a typical landing pattern. As we passed through 500 feet to 400 feet to 300 feet I looked at Jack. He was casually looking out the right window, periodically giving the throttle a short burst to ensure that the engine would keep running. I decided that I would not ask the obvious question. Instead, I turned on the final approach, inline with two rows of bales. The space ahead looked just like a runway, although a little narrow. As we passed over the fence, Jack was looking straight ahead, and appeared completely at ease. I made a perfect landing, whereupon Jack broke into a

great smile. As we taxied back to takeoff position, he explained that he had a deal with the farmer for just such an exercise. He also said that I couldn't have made a better selection and execution. That was my one and only real forced landing in all my years of flying, but it was a great experience. I think I glowed all the way back to our home base!

As a sad footnote to this period, I later learned that "Smilin' Jack" had flown into a mountain in West Texas during a storm. I have often thought that alcohol probably impaired his judgment and possibly his reactions.

My roommate, "Sticky" Roberts, and I were lying in our beds savoring the last moments before rising to get ready for church. Stick turned on the radio to our favorite popular music station. Suddenly, the radio went silent. After a few moments, an announcer's agitated voice came over the radio, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we have this unusual report. We understand that Japanese aircraft have attacked our naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii … the attack is continuing. Standby for further details!"

We lay in stunned silence for a few moments. Then, we started a very immature reaction; "Boy, those stupid Japanese! They don't know what our Navy'll do to them! They don't know what our B-18's can do! (Actually, the B-18, a converted C-47, was a pitiful excuse for a bomber and symbolic or our poor level of preparedness – we knew little of our <u>real</u> bomber, the B-17).

Although we had grown up surrounded by the Japanese military, we were grossly ignorant of the real power that they possessed. I also think that we were influenced by those things that we *had* experienced – the poor quality of Japanese toys, the worst (at that time) cars in the world, some of which ran poorly on charcoal fumes. (Can't you just imagine the businessman who gets up in the morning and says, "Honey, I have to go out and build a fire in the car so I can leave in an hour!")

It was not long before we learned the really crippling blow, which the enemy gave to us. Neither of us could imagine that we would both become involved in the conflagration, he in the Pacific and I in Europe.

Only time would demonstrate the folly of the Axis Powers in misjudging the capacity of the Allies to produce war material and well-trained fighting men of supreme dedication.

Chapter III

Aviation Cadet

As the details of the attack on Pearl Harbor came out, plus the declaration of war by Germany against us, I realized that I could not remain as a student while others joined the war effort.

Since I needed parental approval, once again, to enlist for flight training (I was still just short of 21), I went to Kentucky at the Christmas break and received their blessing. Returning to Wheaton, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps. I was called up on March 14, 1942. After bidding fond farewells to Lois and her parents, I was off on the great adventure of my life.

We were sworn-in en masse at the recruiting station and then rode by truck to Chicago's central station. We were equipped with our own toothbrushes, shaving kit, and an extra set of underwear – period. After some delay (there were always delays) our train pulled out, headed for the Army Air Corps Training Center in Santa Ana, California. Three long days and nights later, our troop train arrived at our destination. Upon arrival, we were issued a set of Army fatigues (like a coverall), boots, socks, and G.I. underwear. Everything was olive drab, including the underwear. We were assigned to barracks and our training began immediately.

On the first night, I was assigned to guard duty. I had never held a loaded gun before, but now I was expected to guard this huge base, with orders to shoot to kill, if the circumstances warranted drastic action! We were given an extensive instruction in gun safety. This included dismantling and re-assembling the old Springfield .30-06 rifles. During his final instructions on gun safety, an older Master Sergeant accidentally shot a hole through the ceiling of the armory building! The report in the enclosed space was deafening and most impressive. Although he looked most chagrined, I always suspected that the old Sergeant

planned this to get our attention. I know he got mine! After giving us the password of the day, plus instructions on how to challenge potential interlopers, we were thrust out into the night to walk our beats in four-hour shifts. I walked mine with great anxiety. Since the entire coast was under strict blackout orders, it was a very dark and fearful night!

After a battery of tests, most of us were accepted as Aviation Cadets within a very few days. We then received a full set of uniforms. I remember being extremely proud of the uniform along with the accompanying brass buttons and the propeller/wing pins, which identified us as cadets.

The ensuing weeks were full of wonderful instruction on how to march, swab the floors, clean latrines, and peel potatoes. We also received some very limited instruction on how to act like "an officer and a gentleman" should. We successfully completed our flight training. On our last day at Santa Ana, a P-38 buzzed our barracks, climbing out in a beautiful slow-roll. It was the first Army plane any one of us had seen.

On April 14th, we were designated as Class 42-J and sent by slow train to our primary flight-training base at Visalia, California. Sequoia Field was located northwest of town, not very far from the Sierra Nevada Foothills on the eastside of the great San Joaquin Valley. (My training took me in stages from south to north through California – from Santa Ana to Sacramento.)

As we arrived at the base (it was a civilian flight school on contract to the Army), we were struck by its neatness. Small, low-winged, training planes were lined in neat rows on the tarmac and there was a constant circling of the same aircraft in the landing pattern. These proved to be Ryan PT-22's (PT for Primary Trainer, of course). They were referred to as "Maytag Messerschmits", because their five-cylinder Kinner radial engines (150 HP) had a certain rattle, which resembled the rather crude washing machines of that era! These little beauties were of all-metal fuselage in bright aluminum, with yellow wings and the tail assembly covered with fabric. Red, white, and blue stripes were on the tail, and

the Army Air Corps star logo was on each wing (a white star on a blue field, and a red dot inside the center of the star). Altogether, the shape of the plane, combined with the bright color scheme, made me itch to get with the flying program immediately.

As it turned out, it took two days to get us processed and enrolled in ground school. The training was intense from the start, including such subjects as meteorology, Morse code, physics, engine mechanics, and navigation. Oh yes, and physical education – the one constant subject at every training base. This was not namby-pamby session, but included a lot of running, obstacle courses, and involvement in the more popular games, such as volleyball, softball, basketball, and touch football.

As my flight training began, I soon realized that I had drawn an ideal instructor. He was calm (most unusual), patient, and very thorough. He knew that I had previous flight experience, so our initial flights, which included the usual stalls, spins, landings, and takeoffs, went by very quickly. I was really startled when we made a short flight of several landings and then he asked me to return to the flight line. Once there, he climbed out and told me to go ahead and fly around for about a half hour, then shoot four landings.

In this plane, the student flew from the rear, open cockpit and all solo flight was from the same position. This aircraft had no radio; all communication between pilot and instructor came via rubber tubing. The instructor shouted into a mouthpiece and his voice came to the cadet's ears through a divided tube, which culminated in little metal tubes built into the flying helmet. Communication was often garbled and it was strictly one-way. It was a hokey, unsatisfactory system, at best.

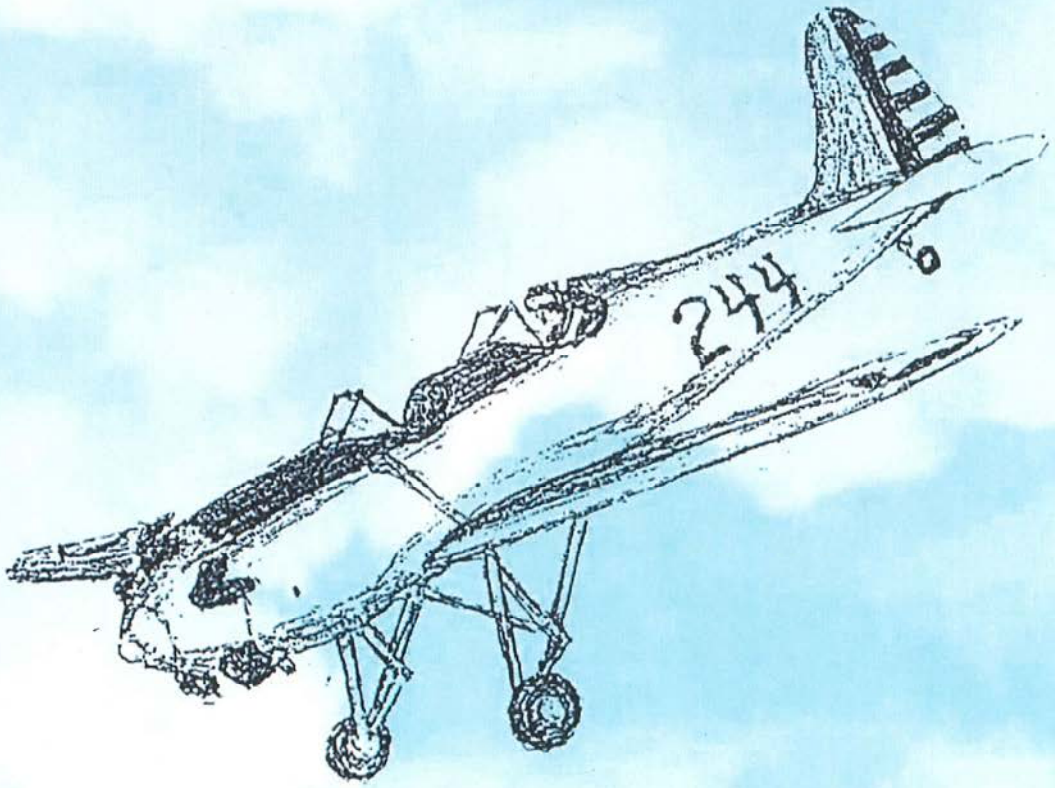
As my instructor watched, I taxied out to the runway, checked the engine via a short run-up to test magnetos (which provided the spark system), and took off. As the tail came up just before the plane left the ground, my adjustable seat suddenly let loose and dropped to its lowest position! My horrified instructor

watched in disbelief as my head almost disappeared from view. All he could see was the top half of my helmet, with my goggled eyes looking straight out to the side – directly at him, rather than looking ahead at the horizon!

I am convinced that my previous flight experience saved my life. I knew better than to jerk at the controls and allowed the plane to lift off almost of its own accord. Looking to the side, I was able to keep my wings level and maintain a very gradual climb. Once I got up to about 400 feet, I was able to let go of the stick in order to raise the seat using my legs and one hand, while working the catch with the other hand. After establishing that the seat was stable, I continued around the pattern, shot a touch-and-go landing to reassure my instructor, and then continued on with my flight.

After several hours of solo flight to establish confidence in the aircraft, my instructor rejoined me in order to introduce me to the great pleasure of aerobatic flying. The PT-22 was an agile little plane, which was stressed to perform every imaginable maneuver.

First came snap rolls, a kind of teeth-jarring controlled spin on a horizontal axis. I never got used to this rather violent maneuver, which was repeated in basic and advanced schools as well. Furthermore, its value was never satisfactorily explained and I grew to resent it altogether! The slow-roll was another matter. I'll never forget the first one: My instructor mumbled something and then the plane was slowly rolling over on its back. As we became completely inverted, my feet came off the rudder pedals and I was suspended by my seatbelt. Every bit of dirt and debris came cascading down from the plane's floor, giving me a good dusting. I took some comfort from the fact that we were wearing parachutes. After several tries, I was able to keep all of my appendages on the appropriate controls and repeat the maneuver satisfactorily.


244

Then followed loops, half-loops (or Immelman turns; where you rolled from inverted to straight flight at the top of the loop), and the split-S (just the opposite of the Immelman; in which you rolled to inverted and did a half-loop, coming out in the normal flight position at the bottom). These maneuvers all became fun in time and I enjoyed doing them solo.

Speaking of parachutes, I should add that we were to wear them at all times in flight during our time in the service. They became the only cushion to our seat and the bulky straps and heavy clips were a nuisance. But, I always felt a great comfort in having this second-chance protection. I never had to actually use one, but at Sequoia Field we did practice bailing out. This was accomplished by climbing a tower, 60-70 feet tall. At the top was a cut-off PT-22 fuselage. After entering the rear cockpit, an instructor fastened you into a parachute harness, which was attached by cable to a large overhead beam. You were then told to jump from the "plane" in a sort of swan dive. A system of pulleys and weights were devised to give you just the right sensation of being jerked back to the vertical position, followed by being rather violently delivered to the ground. The whole exercise was designed to get you down much like a parachute would. Just barely preventing any broken limbs. It was extremely informative, but <u>not</u> fun!

Primary training washed out a number of guys. It was a sad day when one of our friends had to leave. On the other hand, there were a number of guys who overcame adversity to become excellent pilots. One of my suitemates, Roy Peterson, became airsick on every flight in the early days of primary. He had to wash down his plane with a soapy bucket of water on returning to the flight line. Roy, however, prevailed; later serving two hitches in Europe flying P-47 fighters.

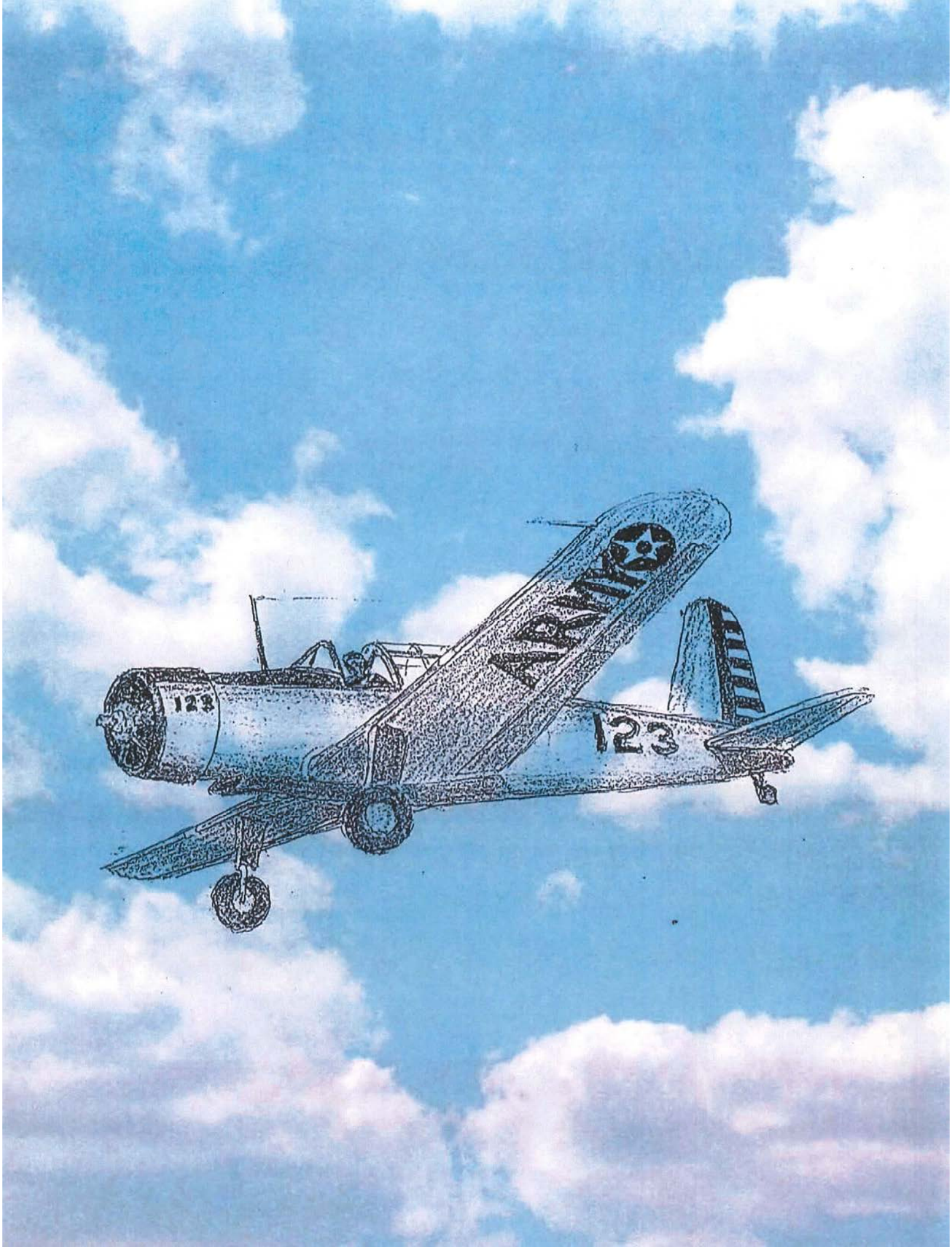
Sequoia Field, being a civilian contract school, had the best accommodations I encountered during the war. We lived in stucco buildings, which were divided into several suites, housing eight to ten cadets (all later

accommodations were large, open barracks, housing about 100 cadets). Each suite had its own bathroom and, invariably, every suite had at least one wag. One particular wise guy in my suite thought long and hard before realizing that he could make us all laugh and enjoy his little joke: The bathroom door opened in. The room had a double shower with a single floor drain. This joker entered the bathroom with a bunch of towels. He covered the floor drain, sealed the base of the door, and turned on both showers full blast. He then climbed out of the window, waited a bit, and then strolled in the front door to watch the fun. One of the guys saw a bit of water seeping under the door and went to investigate. We quickly learned that one-foot of water in the bathroom equaled three inches of water over the whole suite. Since the water soaked things like shoes and footlockers, we did not laugh very long.

Like most pranks, our upperclassmen cadet officers, who meted out punishment, quickly discovered this one. Since none of us would rat on the joker, we all ended up "walking tours" – marching a few miles with a rifle at "shoulder arms". This was a favorite punishment. Over my term of about seven months as a cadet, I became well acquainted with my rifle, while wearing down a pair of shoes in record time!

On June 15th, we were transported to Minter Field at Merced, California for basic training. Here, we were introduced to the Vultee BT-13, a low-wing, all aluminum monoplane with a 450 HP Pratt & Whitney radial engine. At first sight, these planes appeared rather huge. Their wingspan of 42 feet was a full 12 feet wider that the PT-22. A "greenhouse" with sliding canopies covered the two inline cockpits. Radios were used for communication, a vast improvement over the crude system in the PT's.

The BT-13 was a heavy plane, which had a heavy feel. It had a nasty, bone-jarring snap roll and it also had an inclination to spin at or near stall speed. If one flew the plane as instructed, it was a safe and stable aircraft, but it was unforgiving to many careless students.


123
123

During basic, we were introduced to cross-country and night flying. Both activities were challenging, but at the same time significantly broadening. I had always wondered how a pilot could fly at night, but quickly discovered that one could see a great deal and navigate quite easily. I also realized that bad weather would adversely affect one's ability to fly at night. Fortunately, rarely do fog or clouds affect the Central Valley of California during the summer months, so it was an ideal time and place for this type of training.

At Minter Field our instructors were all Air Corps officers who, as a rule, were much more demanding and unforgiving than our civilian instructors at primary. This was probably a real plus, since the aircraft were also so much more demanding.

All of the ground activities were much like those in primary training, but certain classes became more detailed and intense. As before, P.E. was quite strenuous but a fun break from the rigors of closely scheduled training activities.

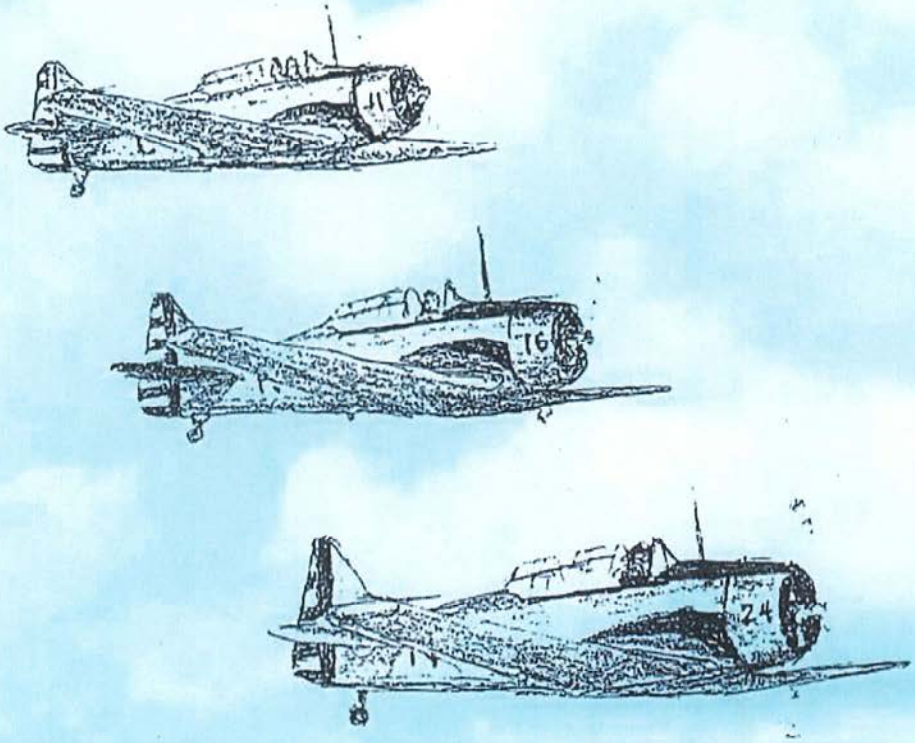
The guy who bunked above me at Minter Field was Bob Ritzler, from Oak Park, Illinois. For some reason, Bob and I could just look at each other and break into an impromptu wrestling match. Since this often-resulted in breaking the tranquility of others trying to get much needed rest, we did a lot of walking with rifles. Our activities were not limited to wrestling either: On one occasion, I nailed Bob's shoes to the rough barracks floor as he took his evening shower. The next day, he was quite late for morning formation and also just a bit angry. I don't recall his retaliation, but it was swift and severe! Somehow Bob and I gained a rather bad reputation as troublemakers.

Bob went to a different advanced training school and I lost track of him entirely. Thinking back, I consider him to be a close kindred soul with whom I had a jolly old time. The tours were all worth the twisted fun that we shared!

On August 15th, we were transported to Stockton Field at Stockton, California. Here, we were introduced to the North American AT-6, a sleek,

all-metal advanced trainer. This aircraft had a retractable landing gear and a "greenhouse", like the BT-13. A nine-cylinder, 600 HP engine gave it a cruise speed of 148 MPH (as compared to the PT-22's 100 MPH and the BT-13's 120 MPH). It was almost identical in size to the BT-13, but it was much more stable and agile. It was a pleasure to fly and I always looked for an opportunity to fly one after leaving Stockton. The AT-6 has often been used in movies to depict the Japanese Zero. It was the closest I got to flying anything similar to a single engine fighter.

Our training during advanced school was quite similar to the earlier stages, with the exception that we took much longer cross-country flights. We were also trained in high altitude flying, using oxygen masks for the first time. On one flight, our instructor led us in a three-ship formation flight up to 20,000 feet, where we could see a great deal of California's north coast, including San Francisco and the Bay Area. For the first time, I could clearly see the curvature of the earth on the horizon of the Pacific Ocean to the west.


11
16
24

Chapter IV

Instructor

October 30, 1942 was one of the most significant days of my life. In the morning I attended our graduation ceremony. In one brief hour I received my silver wings and my gold 2nd Lieutenant bars. I had become a pilot, an army officer, and a "gentleman", along with 158 others in my class. My folks, brother (then a 1st Lieutenant), and fiancée attended the ceremony. The last act at Stockton Field was receiving our orders for our next destination. The group was sent to several different bases. I was directed to report to Mather Field in Sacramento within two days along with about fifty others. We left the base to the stirring notes of the Air Force Hymn, brimming with anticipation.

The afternoon of the 30th was even more significant than the morning. Lois and I were married in the First Presbyterian Church in Stockton. My father married us, my brother was the best man, and Uncle Clyde Plummer (my Mother's Brother) stood in for Lois' Father and gave her away.

The service was a small, informal family affair held in the women's library, a small, but attractive room off the main sanctuary. Informal really described the brief service. Uncle Clyde was a rather bulky man with a huge bass voice. As the music started, he and Lois sort of rumbled down the aisle (about ten feet long with folding chairs). As they approached the front, they got kind of entangled, making an uncertain full 360° turn to finally face my father. At this point, Uncle Clyde rumbled, "Boy, we sure messed that one up, didn't we, Red?"

It took a moment or two before we all stopped laughing and the ceremony started up again. The rest of the service ran well through the exchanging of rings. At this point, my Father decided to offer a prayer of blessing. In his fervor, he gripped our hands so hard that Lois' new ring drew blood. For her, at least, this service made a permanent imprint! We were both

saddened that Lois' family could not attend. Both distance and wartime travel restrictions prevented their opportunity to be with us.

After the wedding, we attended a dinner at a local hotel, after which we were off on our honeymoon. I use the term advisedly, for ours was a very strange interlude. I often say that we spent our honeymoon in Folsom Prison, but this is not entirely accurate. Good old Uncle Clyde was Warden of Folsom Prison, and he had invited us to stay with him and Aunt Faye in the Warden's home, a beautiful mansion located just inside the main gate and between the outer an inner (maximum security) walls. Arriving the next day, we moved into the lap of luxury. Servants (trustee convicts) were everywhere. They were cooks, butlers, custodians, and groundsmen. Most were Oriental-Americans and they treated us like royalty. They were also very comical, explaining that they were quite innocent, in spite of stealing whole safes from soft-touch businesses and other similar "victimless" crimes! We ate better than we ever have, before or since. We could order almost anything and it was always gourmet fare.

On the following day I reported to Mather, only to be told that they were not ready for us and would not be for a week. After a short discussion, we decided that a trip to Yosemite National Park would be in order. We took a bus to Merced, stayed overnight, and then took an open-air tour bus up to the valley.

We spent several days in the beautiful Yosemite Valley. It was not very crowded in those days and we enjoyed the deer, bear, squirrels, and birds. We only made one big mistake. We rented bikes and rode all over the valley. Unfortunately, we were not in "bike shape" and we suffered acutely. We spent most of our remaining daylight hours standing up, trying to appreciate the fabulous views.

After that, it was back to prison with some degree of relief! It may not have been your run-of-the-mill honeymoon, but it was most memorable.

Oct 30, 1942

Bars, Wings + Rings

Yosemite

Returning to Mather, we started training to become twin-engine instructor pilots. We were checked out in the Cessna AT-17, lovingly referred to as the "Bamboo Bomber". This fabric and wood plane, equipped with twin Jacobs engines of 245 HP each, cruised at 120 MPH. The plane was very stable and easy to fly. It had a cabin which could seat five, including pilot and co-pilot. We soon learned to synchronize the engines in order that they run at the same speed, sounding almost like one power source. (If engines remained unsynchronized, they gave off an irritating "whum-whum-whum" sound.)

We also learned what happens when one engine quit on a two-engine aircraft: The plane would slew quickly and sometimes violently in the direction of the defective engine. The wing on that side would tend to drop. Loss of an engine at or near stall speed would require immediate correction in order to avoid disaster, so we practiced emergency measures repeatedly.

Visibility in the AT-17 was excellent, so formation flying was relatively easy. Its spacious cabin made cross-country flights a pleasure.

We were also checked out in the Curtis AT-9, but a shortage of these planes limited flying time. This plane, a twin-engine, all metal monoplane with retractable landing gear, was the closest thing to a rock that I ever flew. It was heavy and underpowered. The cockpit was very tight, holding two people side-by-side. The Curtis was built with great strength. It was the only twin-engine equipped plane that I ever rolled, but it did a beautiful barrel roll. It was said, facetiously, that the AT-9 was the only consistent aircraft ever built, that it took off at 120 MPH, climbed at 120, cruised at 120, and landed at 120. This was almost true. With full flaps and power off, it glided like a rock. One day I actually came over the end of the runway at 500 feet, dropped wheels and full flaps, and landed without overshooting the runway. I had to alternate looking almost straight down through the windshield, with glances at the runway through the ceiling window. Flare-out near the runway was crucial, but the 120 MPH rule worked!

The most eventful thing at Mather was that the Great Central Valley of California became fogged-in solid in November, stopping our training cold. We reported every morning, only to wait around all day. After several days we were given orders to arrive each day with bags packed. A break in the weather would have us fly to Victorville, a desert community near old U.S. Highway 66. Victorville would be above the fog. In a few days, a break came over Mather and we climbed above the white blanket, over the Sierra Nevada Mountains to our new desert home. At Victorville (elevation 4000 feet), the nights and mornings were very cold and the afternoons, quite mild. Visibility was crisply clear for as far as one could see. Our training proceeded at a feverish pace in order to make up for lost time. One of the activities we enjoyed was landing on the desert dry lakes, which were very smooth. Some of these were near the site of Edwards Air Force Base where space shuttles and experimental aircraft now land.

As we neared Christmas we were told that we could get four-day passes. Most of the guys opted to bus into Los Angeles, but I wanted to get back to Lois in Folsom. I finally found a B-25, which was going back to Mather and would return in time. So, I bummed a ride in this beautiful bomber. It almost cost me my life:

As we approached the Tehachapi Pass area it became apparent that the mountains were completely socked-in. I was standing in the well behind, and between, the pilot and co-pilot, looking straight ahead through the windshield. The pilot first tried the deck, flying just above the railroad tracks, but it soon became clear that the pass was closed, so he turned back, climbing out of the tight valley. At this point, the pilot made an almost-fatal error, based on the overpowering desire to get to Mather (this sort of behavior often clouds judgment, leading to horrible accidents). Still climbing, he turned back to the west, aiming straight at the clouds. Thinking he had climbed high enough to clear the mountains, he entered the cloud layer. Within seconds, a small break

appeared, and dead ahead was a snow-capped mountain! The pilot reacted quickly, going into a steep bank to the right. This immediately placed him back into the clouds. We all held our breaths, as he turned due east climbing all the time, flying strictly on instruments. After short minutes, which seemed like an eternity, we broke out on top of the clouds looking at a beautiful clear sky!

After climbing well above the clouds, we were able to turn back west and clear the Sierra's, still encased in clouds. Fortunately, we found the Central Valley to be clear and we proceeded on to Mather without further incident.

After a wonderful Christmas break, I reluctantly took my place in the B-25, and we returned, without incident, to Victorville. Having clear skies in the Sacramento Valley, we flew our planes back to Mather two days later and quickly wrapped up our training. Our orders came through on the 31st of December and we were soon off to some place called Marfa, Texas. Lois and I had purchased a badly used Oldsmobile, which we equipped with a set of new tires before leaving.

The old heap (a 1934?) took us, uneventfully, all the way to Texas. As we topped a long rise several hours beyond El Paso, we looked far ahead into the Marfa Basin. At the time, it seemed like one of the most desolate views we had ever seen, but as it worked out, we were to enjoy fourteen wonderful months in that high country referred to as the Big Bend area. To the north were the Davis Mountains, topping at 8,378 feet. Another line of mountains filled the eastern horizon, running south to the border with Mexico at the big bend of the Rio Grande River.

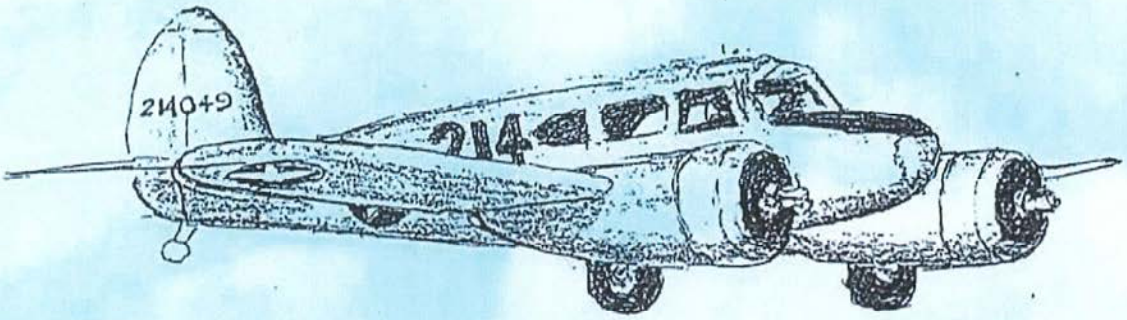
As we drove through Marfa, we explored a bit and couldn't find much to attract us. Looking at the map, we could see that the base was almost halfway between Marfa and a town called Alpine. Since we were a day early, we decided to drive on over and check out the whole area. As we passed the base (elevation 4,800 feet), we could see that it was a rather new, hastily erected complex of wooden frame buildings, standing out like a huge wart on the vast,

open plain. Approaching Alpine, we went through a low pass cut into the foothills of Cathedral Mountain. This was a beautiful stretch of highway and we were immediately drawn to the area.

We found Alpine to be a much more attractive town, somewhat dusty, but comfortably located within the folds of several lower mountains. If there was such a thing as a typical West Texas cow town, I imagined this must be it. It was not unusual to see people riding horses through town, and horse trailers were parked near many homes. A railroad ran through town from east to west and the main street ran immediately adjacent and parallel to the rails. A small station was at midtown. All of the businesses were on one side of the street, facing the tracks. The business district was about six blocks long and one block deep. The town crawled with servicemen, making the place seem to bulge with war-induced crowding.

We decided to look around and we found a comfortable studio apartment in a local motel. We ended up staying there for several months, finally moving to a second floor, one-bedroom apartment.

We found the people of Alpine to be charming, genuine folk. All of the business people were most cordial and we never tired of the typical, "Y'all come back," as we left each store. Our favorite activity was parking on Main Street downtown in the evening and watching the passing parade.



After reporting to the base the next day, I was immediately assigned five new cadets and went to work. I was somewhat apprehensive at first, but I soon found that instructing came naturally to me. I enjoyed explaining, demonstrating, and talking students through the fine points of twin-engine flight. Teaching formation flying was a little more difficult than I expected. Flying from the left seat in a side-by-side aircraft made flying on the left of the lead aircraft slightly more difficult than on the right side. Flying tight formation is a demanding task, requiring constant attention to the lead aircraft's position, airspeed, and any change in flight path. Once an instructor determined that the students had fully mastered the technique, he had to completely trust them to maintain position on his wing. Any change in attitude of the lead ship (from level flight to turns, or to climb or dive) had to be made very deliberately and slowly.

The AT-17 was wonderful for cross-country flights because it was so spacious and comfortable. On one flight, I took two cadets on a night cross-country trip to Deming, New Mexico via Alamogordo. We started very late and stopped for refueling at Deming. The cadets took turns flying (one to Deming, the other on the return leg) while I occupied the right seat as observer.

The sun was just rising as we passed El Paso on the return flight, flying at 9,000 feet. We had all become just a little sleepy from the long night. All of the sudden there was this huge, "BAM!" We were all immediately wide-awake, looking for some explanation. I took over the controls and gingerly tested the elevators, rudder, and ailerons for proper movement and reaction. All seemed to be in perfect order. The engines hummed along as before and all of the gauges indicated no problem. Making a few turns, we determined that there were no other aircraft in sight.

The mystery was solved when we parked the aircraft. I saw that the ground crewman who gave us parking directions was laughing as we cut our engines and set the brakes. Upon inspecting the front of the aircraft, we

discovered the remains of a Golden Eagle, imbedded in a badly dented aluminum nose cone just ahead of the pilots' cockpit!

We did some pretty wild things at Marfa. One day there was this huge, low-level, cross-country flight. Almost every aircraft on the base took part. The triangular course was laid out from Marfa, northeast to Ft. Stockton, then west to Van Horn, and then back to the base. The tricky thing was that half the aircraft were to fly the same course in a reverse direction! We were all given strict orders to fly to the right of the highways, which connected the aforementioned towns. We were to fly no higher than 50 feet above any obstacle, skirting the towns. We took off at about one minute intervals, every other plane going either east or west.

Well, it was one exciting day! About half way around the course the lead ships started to encounter a stream of aircraft going in the opposite direction. Fortunately, discipline was excellent and no one strayed from their proper position, but the whole exercise promoted super alertness. The controllers in the tower worked really hard for hours as aircraft returned to base.

We did some other things that were not sanctioned. Most were illegal and somewhat dangerous. The vast, mostly unbroken plain south and west of Marfa was wide-open cattle range. The highways were mostly straight and there were no telephone poles, so of course we had to practice touch-and-go landings on them. The plains also were occupied by very elusive antelope, which did not allow autos to approach them. So we "approached" them by air, thus angering all hunters and ranchers in the area. In that day there were no organized environmentalists, but if there had been, we would have been a hated breed!

The AT-17 could be flown as slow as 45 MPH with gear and full flaps down, landing at about 40 MPH. One day we were flying out of an auxiliary airstrip, with another instructor acting as a traffic controller, using the radio in a parked airplane. As the morning progressed, a sharp wind came up. I soon realized that it was blowing near 50 MPH, so I came in for a full-flap landing,

clearing the perimeter fence at about 55 MPH. Flying up the runway at about four feet above the surface, I came to the control aircraft and slowed until I was hovering at 50 MPH in front of him. I slowly throttled back until I was backing up in the air. I then did a touch-and-go landing, rolling backwards on the runway, before taking off again. The controller told me I was nuts, and I didn't disagree.

The weather in southwest Texas was generally ideal for flying, but there were some exceptions. We had a few light snowfalls in the winter, and sometimes the wind kicked up a bit too much. Many times we were awed by huge cumulus clouds; some of which were evolved into massive thunderstorms. On one notable occasion a big storm blew in, almost without warning, dumping marble-sized hailstones with great fury. All but a few of our fabric-covered aircraft were severely damaged. The few survivors were planes in the hangers for maintenance, so the base had to shutdown for several days.

I believe that this was when we went to Carlsbad Caverns National Park with another couple. This fascinating place proved to be extremely beautiful, but no place for a claustrophobic. The mean-spirited rangers, who served as our guides, got us several hundred feet underground in this huge, spectacular room, and then turned out the lights. That was the blackest black that we had ever "seen" and we did not like the experience at all!

A few months before we left Marfa, we became aware that there was a semi-famous cadet (in another squadron) at the base. He was a movie actor named Robert Sterling, a sort of "B" actor, but his wife was "A" material for sure – the actress, Ann Sothern. She caused quite a stir on the base. My wife ran into her in the ladies' room of the officer's club one day and the gracious lady complimented Lois on her beautiful red hair. I think my then semi-famous wife glowed for a day or two!

One final incident is worth noting. While we were at Marfa, my brother was instructing Basic Flight at Taft, in California. He had a reputation as a very

tough instructor who demanded high performance from his students – in no uncertain words.

On this particular day, I had just finished a formation flight with a few of my students and one of them had pulled a dangerous move of some kind. We were meeting in an open room screened from the ready room by a wall, which did not go clear to the ceiling. I was talking rather bluntly to this cadet in a loud voice. Unknown to me, a brand new class of cadets had just arrived from basic training – at Taft!

Now, I am told that my voice is quite similar to that of my brother. I was told later that this one cadet, upon hearing my voice said, "Oh no! That hard-ass Captain Phillips has beat us here and I'm going to suffer with him all over again!" I understand that he heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that I was a similar, but different, Phillips. As it turned out, he was assigned to a different instructor anyway.

In early March of 1944, I received orders to return to Mather Field at Sacramento, where they were then giving B-25 training. This was in anticipation of an overseas assignment.

Chapter V

Bomber Trainee

After a brief leave, we arrived at Mather on March 22nd. We had purchased a relatively new 1940 Nash two-door sedan. This car was a big improvement over the Oldsmobile, but it did have a nasty habit of jumping out of gear at the most importune times. At this point, one would have to jump out, open the hood, and jiggle a metal rod back in place. This was great fun in a driving rain!

Upon checking in with the training group, I was startled to learn that my instructor was none other than Robert Sterling, the ex-movie actor. He was a pretty good instructor, but he lacked patience. I got along with him okay, but he unmercifully rode a fellow student, which I thought unnecessary.

I loved the B-25 from the start. Its semi-gull wing gave it excellent stability and it's twin Wright engines of 1600 HP each gave it plenty of power, propelling it at a 230 MPH cruising speed. Visibility was excellent and the cockpit layout was comfortable. The B-25 was easy to fly. The tricycle landing gear made takeoffs and landings very easy.

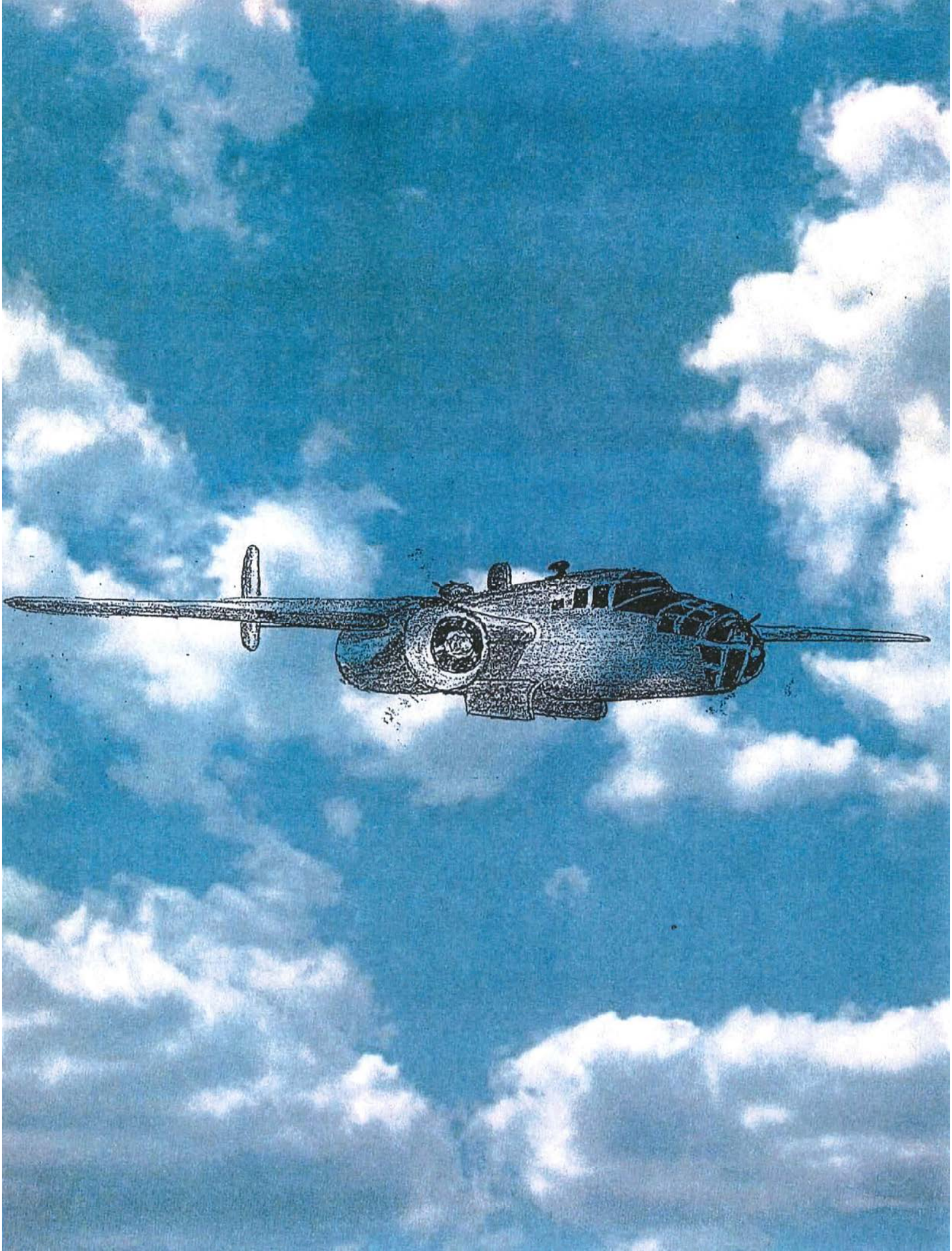
A great number of practice flights took place over Yolo County, west of Sacramento. An auxiliary field northeast of Winters still exists today. At that time the towns of Davis and Woodland meant nothing to us, but I spent many hours flying over that area, enjoying the patchwork-quilt look of the farm country.

Only one incident stands out during this time. I was flying in the pilot's position, with another student-officer in the co-pilot's seat. We were to fly a night cross-country to Portland, Oregon, and back. As our wheels left the runway, I called for wheels up. My co-pilot said, "Wheels up." I called for flaps up. "Flaps up," he said. "Cowl flaps closed." "Cowl flaps closed." About this

time we were approaching Sacramento and the plane was not flying right. It was climbing, but not as fast as it should. The airspeed was down, so I added throttle. The plane seemed very mushy and the engines began to heat up. It should not have taken long to find the problem, but in the darkness we were both slow. Finally, I said, "Check the flaps." Almost immediately the plane began to respond and we were soon at normal climbing speed. Even in the darkness I knew that the co-pilot's face would be flushed. He had put the flaps full down instead of up and the resultant drag made the plane fly like a brick.

While we were at Mather, the great invasion at D-Day took place. We were briefed daily on the progress of the war and I began to feel more a part of significant historic events. I also wondered if the war might end before I went overseas.

When we finished B-25 training, I received another leave before checking in at Columbia, South Carolina. Lois and I drove to Wheaton, Illinois where we had a visit with her folks. Her sister, Dorthea, had a break after finishing nurse's training; so when our leave was over, she accompanied us to South Carolina. We arrived in Columbia just in time to experience the worst heat that we had ever known. It was mid-July of 1944 and the temperature was over 100°F. The humidity must have been around 90%. We checked into a hotel upon arrival in mid-afternoon, and took turns taking cold showers. In those days, air-conditioning was almost non-existent. Cars were not air-conditioned and neither were hotels. Upon hearing that one of the theaters had an air-conditioning system, we had dinner and then got in line for the show. We didn't care what the show was, we just had to get cool! We waited a long time to get in, but once we were there, we stayed through two showings!



We never got used to South Carolina. We found two rooms in a boarding house the next day. The rooms came with dinner and we were quickly introduced to southern cooking – at least one brand of it. Almost every meal demanded the use of gravy, which in those parts, meant almost-pure grease. All told, the combination of impossible heat, high humidity, and greasy food took its toll on all of us. After a valiant effort, and about two weeks, the girls finally gave up and drove back to Illinois, while I took up bachelor officers' quarters on base.

Most of the training at Columbia was very dull and there was no flying at all. Only one very memorable incident stands out. This very smart instructor had a class on chemical warfare right after lunch. Knowing that his class would get very sleepy in the stifling auditorium in early afternoon, he had developed a couple of very clever techniques. First, he started talking (with a microphone) in a very subdued voice. Once he felt that the audience was getting heavy-lidded, he suddenly raised his voice to a near-shout. Then he alternately lowered and raised his voice, which kept us awake – for a while. Knowing that this would not work too long, he played his ace-in-the-hole. Letting everyone get properly sleepy again, he used some excuse to douse the lights and lowered his voice again. Just as we were all on the point of dozing off, he detonated what sounded like several sticks of dynamite! You can believe that nobody got even drowsy after that and we ended up learning a great deal about mustard gas!

The rest of my days at Columbia are a blur. I think I must have gone to a bunch of movies to get cool, but this is just a guess. We were given orders to go (in August) to Morris Field in Charlotte, North Carolina, where we would learn to fly the A-20. I looked forward to this assignment with great anticipation since I had heard so many positive things about the plane. It had been used in North Africa and was then in use over Europe and the South Pacific.

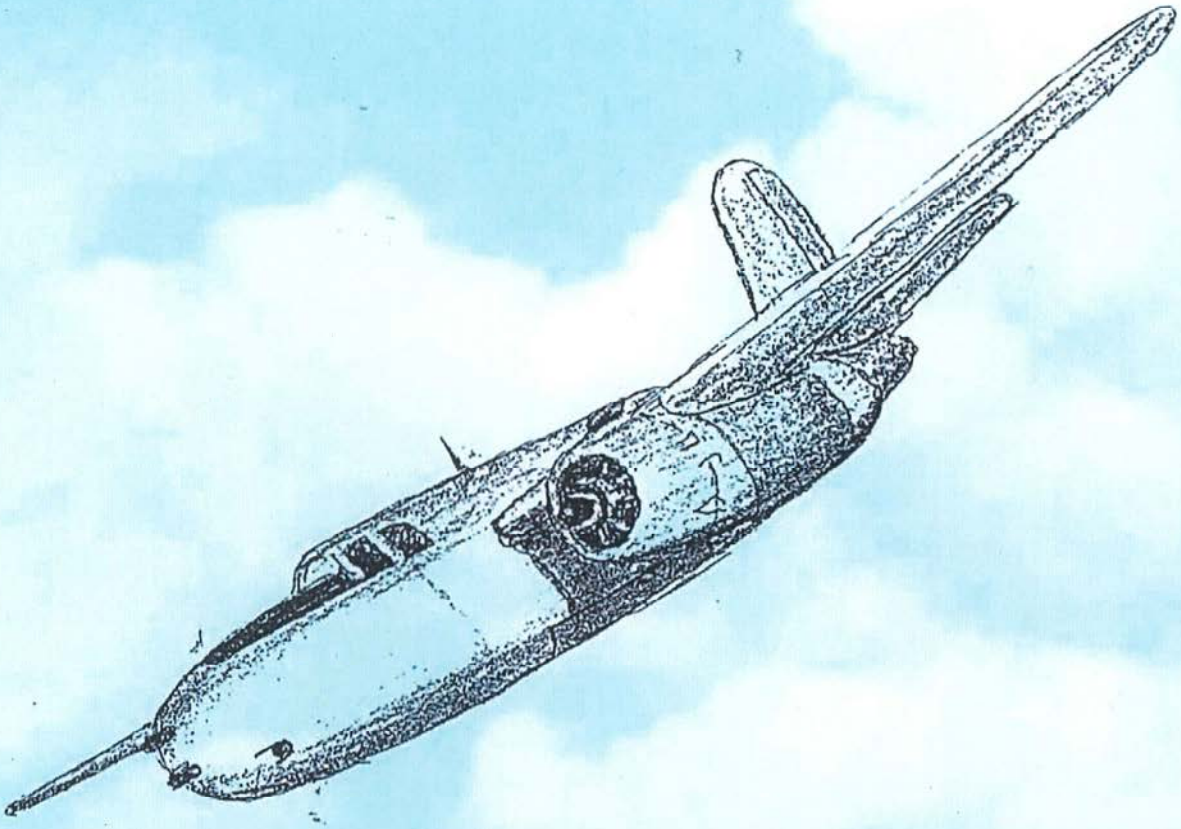
Soon after I arrived in Charlotte, Lois was able to rejoin me. We rented a small apartment not too far from downtown. This apartment proved to have many other occupants. When we first turned out the lights at night, we would

hear these funny noises, which we could not identify. Upon investigation (by quickly turning on the lights without making any noise), we discovered that the place was infested with maybe 500 of the biggest cockroaches in the world! On learning that these playful fellows had become immune to every known poison, we decided to live with them. By storing all of our food in the refrigerator or tightly sealed tin containers, we, at least, kept the population down.

In other respects, Charlotte was a good city. The climate was much milder and the place had a more congenial feel that Columbia. Lois had left our car in Illinois, knowing that my next assignment would be overseas, so we went everywhere by a very efficient bus system.

Flying the A-20 was much as I had imagined. This light attack bomber, powered by two Wright 1600 HP engines, cruised at the same speed as the B-25 (about 230 MPH), but it felt much lighter and more nimble. The pilot occupied a single, enclosed cockpit in a slim fuselage, like a fighter. Behind him, there was a bomb bay and then a space for a tail-gunner, who faced aft. A glass-nosed model held a bombardier-navigator, so the aircraft had a crew of two or three, as compared to the six to seven of the B-25. The plane had a funny quirk: If you forgot to close the cowl flaps <u>before</u> takeoff (most radial engines called for closing them during the climb-out), the plane developed an almost-violent shudder. This was most disconcerting, although it was not dangerous.

The A-20 was one of the most fun planes I ever flew. One day a P-40 jumped me and we had a grand old dogfight. He could out-turn my larger ship, so I had no chance against him, but it was still fun.



I was sent to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for a two-day course in low-level bombing and strafing. I thought this was just great fun at the time. We used unarmed practice bombs, but our strafing was done with live ammunition. Perhaps every tenth bullet was a tracer, which meant that it left a brightly-lit path clear to the target. I remember being fascinated with the stream of bullets running away toward the target. It never entered my mind to imagine what tracers would look like coming at me! Both the bombing (from about 100 feet) and the strafing (from 100 feet, down to perhaps 10 feet) went well and the exercise still brings back an exciting memory.

At Charlotte, I was assigned a crew of Bombardier, Gunner, and Maintenance Crew Chief. This turned out to be rather strange, since during our later arrival overseas, we were all sent to separate destinations and never encountered an A-20 again!

We completed our training in September and were given leave. Lois and I got a ride with my Bombardier-Navigator, Ed Raspberry, to New York. After visiting his father's office in a Manhattan skyscraper and looking at a few sights, we took a train to Chicago and enjoyed a visit with Lois' family.

Near the end of my leave, we went to St. Louis to visit my folks (Dad had become an interim, war-time pastor at a Presbyterian church, where the Pastor had left to be an Army Chaplain). My brother, Charlie, and his wife, Mary Lou, were also there, along with my sisters. Since Charlie was training in B-17's at the time, I had to kid him about sitting on his front porch and flying his house around, while I flew these nimble little attack aircraft. He came back with how comforting it was to have four engines, instead of two! (As it all turned out, he lost all four engines and ditched into the Pacific, while I lost one and flew back to base – but that was much later.)

Chapter VI

Overseas

After saying our goodbyes, I took a flight to Atlanta and then to Charlotte. We soon received orders to go by train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey for overseas deployment. We still didn't know where, or how, we would go from there. Camp Kilmer was a very old Army post and the very best I encountered during my four and a half years of service. It looked more like a college campus, with lots of trees and grass. Concrete walks defined every possible walking path. The food was excellent. Unfortunately, our stay was very brief.

We had about two weeks of rest, briefings, shots, and dental check-ups (ugh, a very thorough, and mean, Army Dentist gave me six fillings without Novocain – I think it was non-existent then). There were no leaves or passes allowed. We had no warning we were about to leave. One evening we went to dinner and were then called to headquarters where we were issued orders to go, via train, to the Port of New York. We were given about two hours to pack. We were allowed one B-4 bag, a multi-purpose canvas bag.

The night train to New York was one of the slowest I ever rode. We arrived in New York well after midnight and were bussed to a pier, where the magnificent Queen Mary was docked. Having sailed on a number of passenger ships, I could really appreciate the tremendous size of the Queen. It took hours to load the thousands of officers and enlisted men. I believe that the ship normally held 1200-1500 passengers; there were 15,000 G.I.'s aboard when we left!

I was placed in charge of about 100 G.I.'s and I had to see them established before I settled into my own quarters. I was appalled at what I found. They were assigned to one of the major holds, down in the very bowels of the ship; there were no portholes. Every wall had pipe and rope cots

suspended four tiers high. The floor space was about 50% covered with cots attached to the steel floor. Returning to the upper decks, I found that every stateroom was crammed with the same kind of cot suspended from the walls, two or three high – except for the cabin I shared with five other 1st Lieutenants. Through some quirk of logistics, we had been assigned to a large stateroom with six beds, which were made of wood and had innerspring mattresses! It was by far the best bed I ever had on a military base. I saw a cabin where about eight Captains were bunked on the usual wall-hung cots. The main salon and dining rooms had been left in their original splendor, so there was just a suggestion of the ship's opulence.

We sailed on October 30th, just as the sun was rising, being backed into the Hudson River by a group of tugboats. The huge ship was turned downriver and our voyage began. As we sailed slowly past the Statue of Liberty, we were treated to a magnificent sight of the statue in the early-morning sun. The rails facing the statue were jammed several people deep and there were not many eyes without tears.

As we hit the open sea, it soon became clear that this ship was really fast; it cruised at near 50 knots. We did not sail with protective Navy ships in convoy. The weather was clear, but quite windy, and large swells soon got to the stomachs of many passengers.

By the second day out, the ship was plowing through huge seas. The Queen was so long that she did not pitch too much fore and aft, but my, did she roll! One of the guys in our cabin said he had heard that the Queen could not withstand a roll of over 45°. He attached a protractor to the wall and suspended a weight with a crossbar. This gave a reading on every roll. I tried to ignore it, but I just couldn't! The most severe roll got to 40° and it was impossible to remain perfectly calm!

By the third day, almost everyone on board was seasick. About four of us got together and spent a great deal of time on an upper deck where we could

watch the great ship plow through the waves. The roll was really spectacular. You would be looking down into the sea and then looking up into the sky. The waves were huge! I think that the combination of fresh air and spectacular action helped to keep us from being sick. We all ate well and slept soundly.

Late in the day, I was called to help with a problem with "my" G.I.'s. I went below, where I was informed by a Sergeant that there had been a fight. I took the two fellows aside, where we sat on a cot. We identified the problem and then talked a bit. They remained angry over a petty difference. I talked a bit about how fast the ship was and that we should not be long at sea, appealing for them to make peace so we could get on with the real war! I also informed them that, if they could not resolve their differences, arrangements could be made for a stay in the ship's brig. This would not make for a happy voyage (it was already not pleasant, but I convinced them that the brig would be much worse). At any rate, they shook hands and wandered off to join one of the many card games. There was no more difficulty, but I often wondered why there wasn't more mayhem, considering the horrendous circumstances. By the way, I didn't really know if the ship had a brig, but just assumed that every ship had some awful place in which to hold troublemakers!

The weather had turned quite warm and the high seas had diminished a bit. We had been going southeasterly, but now we abruptly turned to the northeast.

I don't recall the exact number of days the crossing took, but it seemed that all of a sudden we were entering Glasgow Harbor in Scotland. We were taken off the ship by launch, which took most of a day. We were put on trains, which took us to a holding camp in Stone, England.

We did not stay long at Stone, but did have a chance to do a bit of exploring around the ancient town. The weather was cold and very hazy when we were there. The haze was like a very light fog, making the air feel extra chilly.

On November 12th, we were flown to Paris in C-47's, landing at Le Bourget Airport – the same place where my boyhood hero, Charles Lindberg, landed after flying solo across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. A strange memory pops in here: We had to wait for trucks, so we wandered around the airline terminal building. One of the guys noticed a fantastic custom auto parked in front of the building and we all went to look at it. It was a very long, low, two-seat convertible, painted a brilliant, glossy gold. The windshield was semi-"V" shaped and no more than ten inches high. Something looked fishy about the car, so we started to examine it closer. Looking underneath, one guy found that behind the full-size chrome hubcaps were old wood-spoked wheels! Another fellow found the best clue – a logo printed somewhere low on the engine. We finally decided that it was a cut-down and well-disguised 1933 Hudson sedan!

We were trucked to a holding camp just northwest of Paris where we stayed for about three weeks. While there, we had a chance to explore Paris. I was startled at how little the war had affected the city. I found the "Metro", Paris' subway system, to be excellent. An English-speaking person could easily ride to an amazing number of stations, all within easy walking distance of the major points of interest. I was disappointed to learn that the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower were closed. I thought that Paris was the most beautiful, large city I had ever seen. It's wide, tree-lined avenues and low skyline combined to make it a delightful place in which to walk. The sidewalk cafés were open. I found them to be a most relaxing place to eat and watch the people of Paris.

While walking around the back streets of Paris, I found this charming little shop. I went in to browse around and found a brooch that I thought Lois would like. I could speak very little French and the proprietor spoke no English. I was so intent on buying the thing that I gave her the number of francs she indicated without question. About a half-hour later, I realized I had been taken, but oh well, Lois still has that cheap, expensive brooch!

I found an ice rink and went skating twice. It was a beautiful place, a bit similar to Charles Shulz' rink in Santa Rosa, California. After the first night, three of us were leaving the rink when a young lady, who had been skating, offered to show us to the nearest Metro Station. We were walking along when this furtive-looking guy pulled at my sleeve and put his finger to his lips. I fell back with him and in halting English he said, "She is bad – get rid of her. She was collaborator with Germans. Be careful!" I quickly caught up with the group, thought up an excuse to go our own way, and left her on the street where she probably belonged!

Chapter VII

The Famous 416th

On December 2nd, we were all assigned to combat groups. A group of us were sent to the Ninth Air Force, 416th Bomb Group, where I was assigned to the 668th Squadron. The airbase was at Melun, a village a few miles southeast of Paris. It was late evening when I arrived at "Spent Tent", taking the last remaining cot next to the entrance. On the other side of the door, there was a stack of firewood for the potbellied stove, which was in the middle of the six-man tent.

We had excellent, down-filled sleeping bags. I had no more than settled into the sack than the fun began. An alcohol-laced Texas drawl started to mumble about this weird new guy who had the stupidity to move into "our" tent. The other voices in the tent started to egg him on. The next thing I knew, a hatchet came flying out of the dark, landing with a "chunk" in the woodpile! I did not like that, but I kept my peace. The hatchet was retrieved and the alcohol talked again. In a moment the hatchet hit the pile yet again, this time a bit closer to my head. I got up, retrieved the axe, opened the door, and heaved it out into the snow! Then I said, "You little runt, if you want that axe again tonight, you're going to have to go through me!" The other guys died laughing and I had no further trouble.

Sometime later, this mad Texan awoke in the middle of the night, disturbed by the gnawing sounds made by one of our pet rats that lived under the floor. He pulled out his Colt .45 automatic and fired off a round. He missed the rat (and the rest of us), but awakened the whole squadron! I lived about seven great months in "Spent Tent". Thus, starting my tour of combat duty.

As we arrived on the 2nd, I noted that there were only two olive-drab A-20's in sight. All of the other aircraft were new to me. These silver beauties

looked a little like A-20's, but they were slightly larger, with a squarish fuselage and clipped-off wings and tail surfaces. I quickly learned that they were A-26's, developed by Douglas Aircraft within a two-year period. This plane would fly faster (250-300 MPH, depending on altitude), further, higher, and with a much larger bomb load than the A-20 (or the B-25 or B-26, for that matter). The A-26 had two Pratt & Whitney radial engines of 2,000 HP each. They were the smoothest and sweetest sounding engines I ever experienced. The plane had a unique gunners station, very similar to those in the B-29. The gunner had a remote-controlled gun sight, which was aimed with a narrow bicycle handlebar-like control. As he moved this control, a gun turret above him, and another below, would move to where he was looking. The trigger mechanism was on his "handlebar". The pilot could fire fourteen .50 caliber machine guns, six in the nose and eight in the wings.

Since they did not need us for combat immediately, we had the luxury of flying the aircraft for many hours. I was checked out by the Squadron C.O. within a few days and found the plane delightful to fly. It had a very soft stall, was quite maneuverable, and was easy to land. It had the best single-engine performance of any twin I ever flew, being able to maintain 3,000 feet altitude at about 185 MPH on one engine. Like the A-20, the A-26 held a crew of two or three.

After checkout, I was encouraged to fly as much as possible and I covered much of Northern France in the process. One day, I had just taken off for a local flight, when another A-26 suddenly appeared off my left wing. It was the Squadron C.O. He signaled me to get in position on his right wing, which I did. We were at about 2,000 feet. I no more than established position when he went into a diving left turn. Realizing that this was to be a different kind of formation flying, I determined to stay right on his wing. We leveled out at about 20 feet, doing over 300 MPH. As we approached a group of trees, he went into another steep left turn. I followed closely, even though it appeared that he might dig his

left wing into tree or soil at any moment. He leveled out briefly and, although I had to concentrate strictly on him, I was very conscious of the treetops whirring by just below us. Then he did the unthinkable! Climbing just a bit, he went into a sharp right turn. Talk about trust! I had to put my very life in his hands, looking only at his plane in order to maintain perfect position. All I could see was plane and sky, but I could "feel" the trees just below my right wing. He proved to be trustworthy, though crazy, and I lived through the experience. We flew tight formation for another half hour, but at a more humane altitude.

This Squadron C.O. was an interesting guy. He was from the Midwest, but had enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1939. He had flown many missions in a Hawker Hurricane British fighter and I think he still thought of himself as a fighter pilot. I never saw him in proper uniform, since he always wore an RCAF officer's hat!

The 416th had another plane, which I got to fly. It was a "Noordyn Norseman" UC-64 (I think), the UC standing for Utility Cargo. This high-winged cabin monoplane had been in use by bush pilots in Canada and Alaska. It had been used with wheels, skis, and pontoons. It would carry a terrific load for its size. Again, since we were not yet in great demand, one of us was to be chosen to pilot the UC-64. The good old C.O. took about five of us up. One of the other guys sat in the left seat while the C.O. demonstrated what the plane would do. As usual, he had a ground fixation, flying us through a forest and several farms. I think he wanted to see who would puke first!

In due time he got around to demonstrating stalls, landing, and takeoffs. Now, this plane was a bit tricky to land because of a narrow, conventional landing gear and high center of gravity. The first student did not do well at all, almost ground-looping on landing (a quick, 360° turn, often resulting in one wing digging into the ground). The second student didn't do much better and the C.O. was running out of patience. I was next, and after doing several stalls, we

did several landings. These all went well and he didn't even ask the last two guys to try. I was his UC-64 pilot.

I don't know if that was good, or not, but while I waited to fly combat missions, I had a ball flying papers, equipment, and personnel all over France. One trip was particularly interesting: I flew some important papers to Luxembourg, one of the world's smallest countries. (I believe this flight actually took place after the war was over.) At any rate, this beautiful, neat-as-a-pin country impressed me. I saw a number of chateaus in France, but the huge building in Luxembourg was the most imposing.

All through December, the weather was cold and snowy. Our tent was in a group of six, just beyond a rock wall at the edge of Melun. We were served by a six-holer privy, which seemed like being in a shack at the South Pole! We had a slit trench (like a long foxhole to hold six guys) near the tent, but we had never thought of trying an emergency practice run.

As Christmas approached, the Battle of the Bulge was on. This last-ditch offensive effort by the Germans took many strange forms. One night we were deep in sleep, when a really strange aircraft sound awakened us. There was a low ceiling, so the plane was flying very low. It was obviously a twin-engine aircraft, giving off the "whum-whum-whum" of unsynchronized engines. We thought this very strange, since no American pilot would fly that way. The plane went past our base and then we could hear him circling back. When he came over the second time, there was this big explosion over toward the center of the base. We all started to chatter and one of the guys said, "I think we should wait for instructions." (We had a P.A. system with speakers mounted on poles outside.)

I wasn't about to wait! I quickly donned a helmet, jacket (over long-johns), and fur-lined boots, and ran for the foxhole. Being right beside the door, I assumed that I would be the first to arrive, but as I went to jump in, I realized that Lt. Parkhurst had beaten me to it. He was fully clothed, including

fur-lined pants, which I had left behind. I still don't know how he went out the door without my seeing him. Perhaps he had been in the privy, but that doesn't explain the steel helmet!

The German made another circle, dropping a second bomb. Although he missed hitting anything, the concussions were much more impressive than any 4th of July display! Running out of bombs, the JU-88 made one more circuit, strafing the far side of the base. There was a myth, which was told about a pilot in another squadron, who had stayed in the sack through the bombing, but took off running when the strafing started. He allegedly ran right through the perimeter fence before falling in the snow. Nothing was damaged but his pride! We stayed in the trench for some time after the Germans left, anticipating a second attack, but none came.

A terrible tragedy took place soon after the German attack. During most of the Battle of the Bulge, the weather restricted flying, but there was one break when Allied aircraft could get up. Hearing that a German ammunition train was approaching the front, a group of generals designed a special mission for A-26's. Whereas we usually flew 36-ship formations at altitudes of 10,000-14,000 feet, this mission was designed to have a 6-ship formation fly at 500 feet, directly over the train, dropping time-delay 500-pound bombs.

Due to the danger involved, the six planes were drawn from separate squadrons in two different groups. The flight leader was a major from the other group. We only knew one crew – the pilot and gunner from our squadron.

The mission was a disaster. Every plane was shot down by a huge concentration of antiaircraft guns located all along the train. Every crewmember was killed except the two guys from our squadron. This pilot successfully belly-landed his plane in a field with the full load of bombs still aboard. As I recall, he never flew another mission.

Although it may be too easy to Monday-morning quarterback, we all wondered why it wouldn't have been more practical to bomb the track ahead of and behind the train. In any event, the Germans got their ammunition and we lost our six aircraft and ten crewmen.

Around the New Year, we had another unusual event. A P-51 fighter group had flown cover for our group on a mission over Germany. On returning to France, they learned that their base was socked-in tight by fog, so they were diverted to our base, which was still open. Four of the pilots were assigned to bunk with our squadron. I don't know if those guys were typical fighter pilots, but they were really crazy. They talked and drank most of the night and I wondered how they could fly out the next morning.

After a good breakfast, they seemed perfectly chipper. Our four fighter pilots took off and circled the base at low altitude. They came through the gap between the privy and our tent, single file, at about three feet, doing over 300 MPH. They pulled up just in time to clear the six-foot rock wall and immediately started climbing-victory rolls! Our tent sort of billowed up, but the ropes and stakes held. We were all hiding behind the privy, but got a terrific view of their antics.

In early January, I started making a number of UC-64 flights to a base at Laon, a town about 170 miles northeast of Paris. This was to be our new base and I carried both files and personnel to set up the headquarters building. Just for spice, I would fly up to the Eiffel Tower, turn northeast, and follow the highway to Laon. I enjoyed seeing Paris from the air, being able to appreciate its neat, widespread layout. Laon itself was a small, ancient town on a hill, west of the base. Its residents seemed to hate both Germans and Americans. Every store, café, and house was boarded up at sundown.

Also about this time, I took a flak-happy pilot to London so he could be shipped home. After aborting three missions in a row and almost crashing on takeoff, he was declared a risk and sent home. I enjoyed London, staying in

Grovoner House, a posh hotel set up for officers on leave. I took a cab tour of the city, which was excellent. London was historical and well laid-out, but it didn't equal Paris for beauty.

Shortly before we moved to Laon, I had two unusual visitors. Being called to headquarters, I was introduced to two French journalists. These two men had been to Saipan, where they had interviewed my brother Charlie, who was flying B-29 missions over Japan. He had given them my name and group number and they had found our base. I was invited to dinner and spent a pleasant evening with them, but it seemed that our conversation became somewhat stilted, since I could not say much about my activities.

Chapter VIII

Laon / Combat

We settled in at our new base, with "Spent Tent" occupants still together. Concurrently, I started flying combat missions. A typical mission went like this:

We were awakened very early in the morning (assignment to a mission was made the previous afternoon), dressed, and went to a healthy breakfast. This was in a very old, stone and mortar farm building where it was reasonably warm. Following breakfast was a mission briefing in an adjoining barn, which had a raised stage. We sat on long benches, set on a concrete floor. Behind the stage was a wall about the size of a large movie screen. On this wall was a huge map of Germany, Austria, and the western-half of Czechoslovakia. A roll-down screen was available for overhead projection of photographs and drawings.

The briefing began with a comprehensive weather review, which included our base location, en route and over target. A forecast of conditions upon return home was included.

Intelligence officers then reviewed the target area, usually including recently taken photographs by P-38 photo-reconnaissance aircraft. This was done in great detail, including anticipated anti-aircraft emplacements. The importance of the target to the Allied war effort was always stressed. (Our 9th Air Force stressed "tactical" attacks on bridges, railroad marshalling yards, trains, and convoys – as opposed to the "strategic" mission of the 8th Air Force, which stressed attacks on manufacturing plants, oil refineries, and airfields.)

The mission leader described the flight in detail, laying out the route, altitude, and airspeed. Almost all missions were composed of 36 aircraft, flying in six flights of six ships each. These six aircraft flew in tight formation, three in a "V", followed by three more, flying just below and slightly behind the lead "V".

At the target, each flight of six aircraft bombed it independently. The lead ship of each flight had a bombardier-navigator.

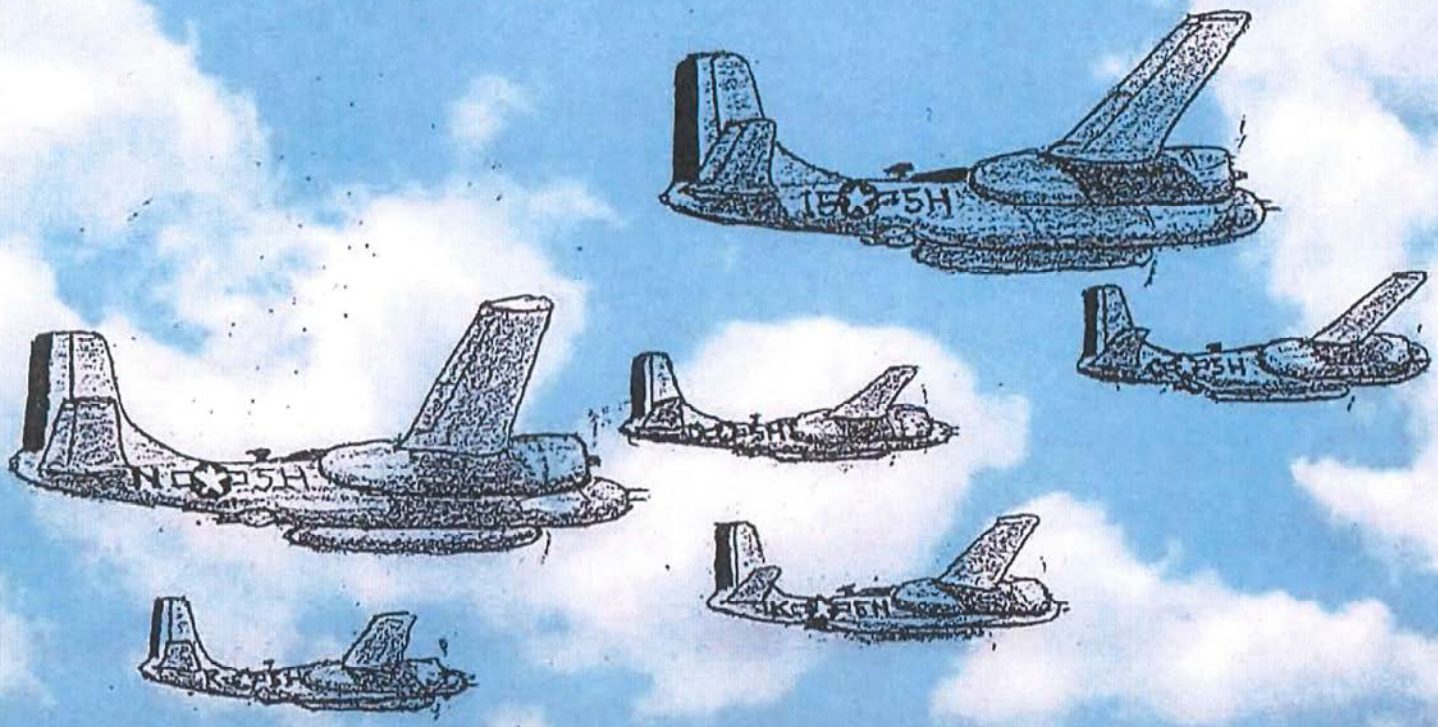
Each mission was flown with several legs, changing headings every half-hour or so, in order to mask the final destination. Every trip included an "Initial Point" (I.P.), where the flights broke up from the main group, turning to their final target heading. From that point on, the bombardier was in control. When he opened his bomb bay doors, we opened ours. When he dropped his bombs, we dropped ours. By aiming just short of the target, he ensured that the six ships would saturate the target area.

We would be joined near the German border by our "little brothers", the fighter cover group, which flew above us, crisscrossing all of the time.

The last item at the briefing came with the "hacking" of our watches, setting them precisely with that of the leader. In that way, any significant changes in plan would be perfectly timed by everyone.

After the briefing, we went to our planes where we would wait for engine startup time. This wait could vary greatly, depending on weather conditions. I used this time to preflight check the aircraft and talk to the ground crews and my gunner, Bill Miller.

Thirty-six aircraft on the taxi strip was an impressive sight, with every ship in its proper place. Since takeoffs were made in 15-20 second intervals, it took several minutes to get all of the aircraft off the ground. During this time, Bill and I got on the intercom and shared a prayer, thanking the Lord for the gift of that day and asking Him for courage, strength, and alertness while remembering our folks back home.


15
5H
5H
5H
5H
5H
5H

Following takeoff, the mission leader would start a huge, climbing circle. His own six-ship flight would form up very quickly, but it would take some time before the other flights could join on the leader. Usually, two circuits of the big circle would be enough to get all 36 ships together. If you were in one of the last two flights, the view of the massive formation ahead was simply awesome!

My first three missions were too easy, although flying tight formation for several hours was always fatiguing. When the briefing officer indicated, "Moderate flak over the target," I was a bit apprehensive, but on those first missions, the flak was quite inaccurate. We would fly through these gray puffs of smoke and I was lulled into thinking that this flak business wasn't so tough.

My fourth mission turned out to be a real eye-opener. On this flight, "moderate flak" meant something quite different! I don't recall the target, but the conditions were entirely new. First of all, the target was partially obscured, so we did not drop our bombs on the first run. Secondly, this flak was <u>real</u>! Very black bursts hit all around us and I could hear the "whump, whump, whump" of the airbursts. My mouth became absolutely, totally dry. I felt that I needed much more than the 1-½ inches of armor plate under my seat. The second run at the target was just terrifying. I felt that I didn't dare to breathe. Only the intense concentration needed to maintain position and get the bombs away kept me on an even keel. Intense relief followed as we made a sharp, diving turn away from the target. So this was why the veteran pilots always looked so haggard after a mission – this was what they expected on <u>every</u> mission!

The time between missions, usually one to three days, was an opportunity to unwind. The very best morale booster was a letter from home. Lois wrote often, which was a real shot in the arm. The big event of any week was the arrival of a "care package". Lois could really make chocolate chip cookies, and the "Spent Tent" guys looked forward to their arrival. (<u>All</u> food packages were <u>always</u> shared with one's tent mates.)

Once the weather warmed just a bit, we were able to get outside for some exercise. We were playing softball one sunny afternoon; I was playing centerfield and a guy hit a ball just over my head. I forgot where I was and backed up. They said that the ball got to me at the exact instant that I disappeared, falling backwards into a rather large foxhole! Although dazed, I retrieved the ball and crawled out, holding the ball as if I had caught it. I think that they gave me the out just because I survived the fall!

On another morning, we were out playing ball again when we witnessed an unforgettable sight: A faraway "hum" made us stop in mid-play. The hum seemed to fill the sky and it was growing. Within a few seconds, it turned into a roar of engines. In just about a minute, we started to see them coming from the southwest. The sky absolutely filled, horizon-to-horizon, with C-47's towing two gliders behind each aircraft at an altitude of about 1,200 feet. With such a heavy load to tow, the huge armada was lumbering along at a relatively slow speed. It took several minutes for the formation to fly over, and we stood in awe, drowned in the roar of several hundred engines.

We had witnessed the beginning of one of the largest airborne troop missions in history. These troops were to be dropped beyond the Rhine River. As we watched, we could only wonder at the courage of such men, for we knew (as they probably did) that they were bound to suffer huge numbers of casualties.

Soon after this, I was chosen to go on a very different kind of six-ship mission: As I listened to the briefing, I couldn't help but think of the disastrous six-ship mission during the Battle of the Bulge. We were to fly to the small German town of Miltenberg, where our target would be a good-sized railroad marshalling yard. We would bomb the target from 6,000 feet and then return to strafe the target at low altitude. Anti-aircraft defenses were thought to be minimal in this remote town in Southwest Germany. Although I was a bit

apprehensive about the mission, I was also curious about what those fourteen 50 caliber guns would do on the strafing run.

We had been given one word of caution: Photo-recon photographs showed a large, one-story building right near the end of the multi-track railroad yard. It was marked with a huge red cross on a white field. Although the Germans were known to disguise military targets with the Red Cross symbol, we were ordered to treat it as if it really were a hospital.

The mission was relatively short and we went over the border at 8,000 feet, dropping to the chosen altitude as we approached the target. We went straight in without the usual I.P. turn and dropped our bombs, flying northwest to southeast. There was no flak at all. Passing the target, we flew on for several miles and then made a wide U-turn to the left. As we approached the town again, we went into echelon formation (this had each aircraft flying just to the right and slightly above the plane ahead, making a single, diagonal line like half of an inverted "V". In other words, like a line of geese in formation that have lost the left half of their "V". (Is this clear, or what?)

Passing the target on our left, we peeled off in 30-second intervals, going into a very steep, diving turn to the left. Our dive took us to about 350 MPH. I was the last plane in the group and I had a fantastic view of the smoking target and the planes ahead in their dive. I started to fire my guns at about 250 feet. The aircraft shuddered like crazy and my gunner, Bill, told me later that he thought we had been hit and were "going in"!

The whole target, as seen from about 40 feet, was just devastated. Steam spouted from a couple of locomotives, which were on their sides. Perhaps 100 freight cars were strewn like matchsticks all over the yard. Craters still smoldered where our bombs had twisted the tracks into odd shapes. My tracer bullets tore into the target area, but there was no undamaged thing left to hit. I saw no people anywhere.

Carefully avoiding the Red Cross building, I banked through the town and then followed a narrow valley with a road leading to the southwest. As I started my climb, here came a truck around a corner, coming down into town. I gave him a short burst and like in slow motion, he came to a stop and jumped into a ditch. Due to the steepness of the valley, I had no chance at all of hitting the truck and I missed him by at least 50 yards. Later, I thought about it and felt glad that I couldn't hit the guy. He was the only German I ever saw during the war and he was probably some poor farmer trying to survive the devastation of his country.

At the debriefing which followed each mission, I noticed again that the Major who led our flight had that haggard, "how did we survive that" look. Thinking back at the previous experience with heavy anti-aircraft fire, I began to appreciate what he had gone through.

A few missions later, we had gone to a target where we encountered what I thought was very light, inaccurate anti-aircraft fire. About an hour after I returned to our tent, I got a call to the flight line. The crew chief on the plane I had flown wanted to see me. As I came up, he held out his hand, in which he held something. He said, Lieutenant, I've got something for you – a souvenir." Opening his hand, he presented me with a shiny 3" x 2" piece of German 88 shell.

"Let me show you where I found this," he said. We went up into the cockpit, where he showed me the hole in the floor. It was just ahead of the control column and exactly midway between the rudder pedals, where my feet had been. Going outside, he showed me the entry hole where the piece of shell had penetrated the 1 ½" soft aluminum armor plate under the cockpit area. This soft armor was designed to slow up projectiles, rather that deflect them. It could have saved my life. I still have that piece of flak somewhere.

After my 10th mission, I was given a four-day leave along with a few other pilots. I flew them all to London. "Anthony" had relatives in Scotland and he

wanted to go there, so I decided to go along. The British trains were spotless and on time (as opposed to our crummy war-time trains). The English countryside was beautifully green. I stayed in Edinburgh while he went on north. The city was kind of dreary and damp, but the huge castle on a hill was magnificent. It was a very restful leave and a good relief from combat.

Many of the missions have faded in my memory, but a few still stand out. As the war progressed into its final stages, we flew deeper and deeper into enemy territory. One memorable mission was Salzburg ("Sound of Music" Salzburg), Austria. The target was the marshalling yards on the edge of the city. It was a brilliant day as we skirted the Swiss Alps and Austria. I had to take quick looks to see the rare beauty of the snow-capped peaks. As we flew east, huge cumulus clouds began to form over the mountains. As we approached the I.P., we were headed southeasterly, directly toward a high peak (about 12,000 feet – we were at 10,000 feet), which was between clouds. As we went into our big turn toward the target, we flew through a thin cloud, whereupon some wag got on the radio and yodeled! Breaking radio silence was forbidden, but this act broke the tension for a lot of uptight guys. We zapped the target and avoided destroying the historic city.

On one other late mission, we had climbed to the unusual height of 17,000 feet in order to stay on top of scattered clouds. We again encountered mild flak as we dropped on the target. After turning for home, we started a long, easy descent. We were still over Germany when Bill called on the interphone, "Skipper, I think we may have a problem with the left engine. The nacelle is covered with oil and we are leaving a dark trail behind us."

I pulled away from the formation and confirmed Bill's observation. I checked the oil pressure and it remained normal. I called the mission leader and told him of our problem. I also told him that I would stick with the formation, but fly further out in order to watch the oil pressure gauge. When the pressure dropped, I would feather the propeller (twisting the blades into the wind, which

stopped rotation completely) and shut down the engine. He confirmed my message and wished me luck.

Within about ten minutes the oil pressure started to drop, so I shut everything down. We were still at 10,000 feet, so I tilted the nose down slightly, allowing me to maintain about 200 mph on one engine for a long time. We kept the group in sight until we were reasonably safe over France. When we got down to 2,000 feet and getting closer to the base, I had Bill join me in the cockpit (he could easily come through the bomb bay).

As we approached the base, there were still two flights in the air, orbiting the landing pattern. Our plane flew nicely on one engine at 2,000 feet, so it was no difficulty circling the base. The tower suggested that I try firing up the engine again for landing. I did not like the idea, being afraid of fire, but I complied. (About two weeks earlier, a crippled plane tried to land using one engine, missed the runway, and crash-landed. Although no one was hurt, I think the tower was fearful of a repeat performance.)

At any rate, the engine fired up in time for me to lower wheels and flaps and make a safe landing. I immediately shut the engine down again and we were safely home. Bill and I grinned at one another and heaved a sigh of relief!

Chapter IX

Pillars in the Sky

My longest mission came very late in the war. We were to fly deep into Czechoslovakia and bomb a key oil refinery – an unusual target for the 9th Air Force. As we went to our briefing, it was apparent that it would not be an early takeoff, since the base was socked-in by fog. The briefing put great emphasis on the importance of destroying this particular refinery, since the Germans were reeling from a loss of military resources and a successful mission could hasten the end of hostilities. Air defenses were expected to be quite strong due to the strategic nature of the target.

As anticipated, we did not get off the ground until about 11:30 AM. The overcast had risen a bit, but it was still too low to safely form the large formation below the clouds, so takeoff intervals were increased to a minute. Each aircraft would climb straight out on instruments at a specific speed and then the group would form up above the cloud layer. The resultant delay made the real start of the mission quite late, but all went well.

The sky above the cloud deck was beautifully clear. As we flew east in a gradual climb toward 10,000 feet, the cloud deck below us also rose, topping perhaps at about 5,000 feet. Near the German border, we encountered an unusual circumstance. An upper cloud layer appeared, with its base near 8,000 feet. We leveled off at 7,000 feet and flew through this "tunnel".

We could see that there was a break in the clouds far ahead – a "light at the end of the tunnel" effect. About half way across Germany, we broke into a perfectly clear day, where our "little brothers" were waiting for us. Incidentally, I never observed any fighter combat near us. For one thing, concentrating on formation flying prevented any sightseeing, and most of the time our fighters were far above us. On two missions I could see circling contrails above with

peripheral vision, but there were never any reports of actual fighter combat by our escorts.

This raid was a particularly big deal. We knew that other groups were over the target ahead of us. This became quite obvious while we were still about 40 miles away. We had climbed to 10,000 feet. Even at this distance we could see a black pillar of dense smoke billowing up to about 8,000 feet. As we passed the I.P. and turned on our bombing run, we could see (again, only out of our peripheral vision), a column of bright red fire rising up to about 4,000 feet. It seemed like getting a brief glance into hell! There was no anti-aircraft fire.

We were able to add our load of bombs to the disaster below and just skim the top of the rising black column. (We were told later that the smoke rose finally to above 20,000 feet.) The target was completely destroyed. Leaving the area, the group quickly re-formed and we headed west.

As we flew back, I could not help but think that we were witnesses to the last throes of the German Reich. That devastating blow just seemed symbolic of the death of a huge evil. We knew that other allied aircraft were out in force, hitting targets all over Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria.

At that time, we had no knowledge of the real extent of that evil below us. We would only hear about places like Dachau and Belsen (which we flew over that day) well after the end of the war. But we had looked into the face of evil in that huge column of fire and smoke. It was comforting to think that we had contributed in a significant way to the impending end to the awful destruction below.

As we flew west, we again contacted the two cloud layers we had flown through on the trip out. Seeing that the top of the upper cloud layer was extremely high, the group leader led us back down between the layers. As we re-entered the tunnel, it quickly became apparent that a fantastic change had taken place. A quirk of weather had created a most unusual condition. Between

the two decks of stratus (flat) clouds, huge columns of cumulus clouds had surged up, connecting the two layers like pillars. These were not the usual monster cumulus storm clouds, but rather narrow, billowy columns. It looked to me like we were flying through a huge Parthenon building in the sky, with 3,000 feet between floor and ceiling and as wide and deep as one could see. It was like we had flown from hell to heaven in one flight!

As we neared France, we could see the "end of the tunnel" ahead again, but before we flew through the last of the majestic "building in the sky", the setting sun far ahead projected a pinking glow to all the clouds. Much later, I tried to paint a picture of what I saw that evening, but I could not do it. It was too magnificent a sight to capture. It seemed to me at the time that the Lord was giving us this "special effect" as a sign that He was still on His throne, in spite of the devastation we had witnessed that day!

As we came out of the clouds, it became obvious that dusk was quickly approaching. Although the upper deck of clouds had disappeared, there was still a layer below us, but with holes here and there. The leader broke up the large formation. We turned on our running lights and each flight went into echelon formation. Then we had a grand parade; peeling off with every aircraft in its proper order, we played a great game of follow-the-leader, spiraling down through a gap in the clouds and ending with a carefully-timed landing. After the long and tiring day, this gave an exhilarating finish to the mission.

We flew a couple of missions after that, but it was obvious that the war was winding down. There was no flak at all. Finally, and mercifully, the war was over. V-E (Victory in Europe) Day gave us all a big sigh of relief, but of course the war in the Pacific still wore on and we were uncertain what part we might play. I had flown 26 missions and was ready for a good rest.

To All Personnel of the Ninth Air Force

Order of the Day

The unconditional surrender of all German forces marks the attainment of our objective in Europe. It follows the complete defeat of the enemy on land, sea, and in the air. From friends and enemies alike has come evidence of the tremendous role of air power in accomplishing this historic success. In our pride, may we give humble thanks to Almighty God for the faith and strength he gave us in our cause, and pray His grace for those we have lost in the battle. Each man who fought and died is inseparable with those who fought and lived. By the strength of our faith and in your determination you have come thousands of miles to drive a powerful enemy from the skies, then turn your weapons against the foe on the ground to destroy his ability to resist. To each one of you is due this credit. Our force could not have fought without the untiring effort of the individual. We must guard against the illusion of final success. We must not only defeat our remaining enemy, but we must also insure future vigilance against the cause of war. This so that the world may not again suffer under ruthless conquerors. It is in this ultimate success that we shall find the justification for those who have died as well as the work that has been accomplished by those who have survived.

(s) Lt. Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg
Commanding General
9th Air Force

Chapter X

V-E Day to V-J Day

Immediately following the end of hostilities, we flew a couple of mercy missions. One of the enlisted men in our squadron had a grandmother in Amsterdam. He had heard that she and a number of relatives were suffering from malnutrition, so we had three aircraft rigged to drop food packages via small parachute. We obtained a detailed map of the city and located her address. The G.I. rode in the bombardier's station in the glass nose of the lead aircraft. We flew over the city at 500 feet, found her street, and dropped the packages where we thought her house was located. The three ships went in tandem, all dropping in the same general area. Circling back over the "target", we found the streets to be filled with waving people. We later heard that the grandmother had retrieved many parcels, but the whole neighborhood shared in the loot!

Another such mission took us to a Prisoner of War camp well inside Germany. We did a similar drop, but this time from about 200 feet. This was a camp, which specifically housed U.S. Air Corps personnel. These guys were just jumping up and down and waving like crazy as we made our drop.

As a morale booster, we were encouraged to take our maintenance crews on tours of German towns and cities where we had dropped our bombs. On most of these "missions", we flew between 10 and 500 feet altitude, skimming past wreckage wrought by our (and the heavy bombers') missions. Flying over cities like Cologne, which had been bombed to mostly rubble, was almost sickening. Oddly, the twin spires of the famous cathedral still stood, jutting up out of the otherwise flattened city.

Flying at extremely low-level, it was interesting to note the contrast as we passed over national borders. Although France and Belgium had sustained less damage from the war, their towns, near the German border, were a shambles of

broken walls and piles of bricks, which lay where they had fallen. Holland and Germany, though hit hard by bombs, tanks, and cannon fire, were identifiable by neat stacks of bricks, stones, and usable lumber. There was another clear sign of which country we were over. As we flew low over the farmlands of France, Belgium, and Holland, the farmers stopped work to wave at us. As soon as we passed into Germany, the farmers shook their fists at us. One guy even tried to throw a pitchfork at us, but he missed by about 50 feet!

I also flew a few trips in the UC-64. One such trip took place only a few days following war's end. I had to deliver some kind of important documents to the former German airbase at Wiesbaden, the temporary headquarters of the Allied Armed Forces. Upon landing, I noted the wreckage of a Heinkel bomber and a Focke Wulf 190 fighter. To me, they represented the strong, but futile attempt by the Nazi's to take over the world.

This base was still in recovery. The runways had roughly patched bomb craters and several buildings were flattened. As I walked to the headquarters building, I noted that many German civilians, both men and women, were working to bring order from chaos. Universally, they glared at me with ill-disguised hatred. I understand that it took a great deal of time before this resentment ended.

It was not long before we learned that the "Famous 416th Bomb Group" was slated for service in the Pacific. This brought on a tedious bunch of practice missions with our usual 36-ship formation. This became just plain hard work without the satisfaction of real accomplishment. We also flew some shorter, small-formation sorties. One such flight almost ended in disaster:

I was leading a three-ship "V" formation when I received a request from another pilot to join us and fly the number four position. (The lead ship was #1; the left-winger, #2; the right-winger, #3; and the #4 flew just below and behind the leader.) I approved the pilot's request and reminded #2 and 3 that we now had a four-ship formation. They acknowledged the addition.

We flew for about another 40 minutes and then approached the base for landing. We made a long, straight-in approach and I called for a change to echelon formation. In this maneuver, #3 stays where he is, #4 slides back and then out to the right, #2 slides back just a little and then ducks under #1 and 3, then coming back up on #3's right wing. #4 then joins on #2's right wing, making a stepped-up echelon. In this case, #2 forgot that we had a #4 (I should have reminded him) and he ducked down and back immediately. The two aircraft crumpled wingtips, but fortunately, neither lost control. We had quite a discussion later, with relief and recrimination mixed!

On July 16th, the group moved to a staging area base at Liege, Belgium. As we de-camped, an unusual thing happened: A large group of farmers were in attendance, hoping to get anything left behind. Several had dogs. As we took down our tents and lifted the wood floors, our herd or rats ran in all directions. Some of the dogs were terriers and they had a ball! They killed every rat with a quick snap of the neck and we cheered!

At Liege, we would receive huge belly tanks, which fit snugly in the bomb bays. These would give us ample gas for flying home via Africa and South America. This process took a great deal of time and there was very little flying done.

While at Liege, I had my second experience with hail. A huge storm blew over and just pounded the area with hail, again damaging every aileron and elevator surface, which were fabric covered. Again, a time-consuming job of patching took place. Ground crews wanted a test of the first repaired aircraft, so I volunteered. After flying around the local area for a while, I came over the field at 300 MPH and then landed. The patches held.

Also while at Liege, I discovered that my aircraft was a very early model, which weighed considerably more than the others. By literally pleading with the C.O., I got the modifiers to remove the eight guns, which were mounted in four pods under the wings. I believe this saved our lives at Dakar a few weeks later.

On or about August 1st, we took off on our journey home. My crew chief rode in a jump seat to my right. We flew first to Marseilles on the south coast of France. The weather was significantly warmer, but it was not uncomfortable. It felt a good deal like the mild temperatures of Southern California.

The next leg was from Marseilles to Marrakech in Morocco, a distance of 1,000 miles. We skirted Spain, flying within a mile of Gibraltar – the imposing "Rock". The huge, sandy airbase at Marrakech was not a pleasant place. It was extremely hot and there were bugs everywhere. It was a pleasure to leave early the next morning.

The third leg took us 1,300 miles to Dakar, the most western point on the African continent. We flew over a huge, featureless desert after passing over the Atlas Mountains. This was a very boring flight and the desert appeared very foreboding. It was no place for a forced landing!

Dakar was very hot and humid, being right on the coast. The airstrip's west end terminated right at the ocean and perhaps four feet above the high tide mark. It was very difficult trying to sleep in the extreme heat.

We were awakened before daylight and given an excellent breakfast, plus a sack lunch. Our planes had been topped off during the night, so we were ready to takeoff at dawn. We were to fly in a three-ship loose formation. A special, cross-Atlantic navigator would lead us (ha, ha!) for the 1,800 mile crossing to Fortaleza, Brazil. There were two, anchored ships to provide radio directions and weather updates. These ships were spaced about 650 miles apart.

The temperature was about 110° as we took off at dawn. There was no wind. I knew that this would make the takeoff difficult for our heavily-loaded ships. This proved to be the only time that I ever used every inch of a runway. As the ocean seemed to fly at us, I knew that this would be a dicey situation. As I got to the runway's end, I raised the landing gear and eased the plane into the

air. She sank slightly and we seemed to skim the waves for a half-mile or so. Finally, the plane began to climb and I was able to raise the flaps. We climbed to about 10,000 feet and started the long, southwesterly flight. It was a beautiful, clear day, with a few scattered clouds below us.

About two hours out, I tuned my radio and also tuned in my radio-compass. This instrument would point directly at the radio station if the signal was strong enough. As we passed the first ship, I noted that radio-compass indicated it was off to our left – so far that I could not see it, but the signal was strong, so I was not concerned.

As we passed the second radio ship, the same thing happened. I questioned the lead aircraft, but was told that there was no sweat, we were just a little right of course, but I did not worry, since the experienced navigator surely knew what he was doing.

I believe now that what he was doing was dozing away in the bright sunshine! After about another 1-½ hours, I tuned in to the station at Fortaleza. The station was rather weak, but enough to give me a reading on the radio-compass, which showed the station about 30° to the left. I called the lead aircraft again and told him that I thought that we were far off-course to the right. He sort of implied that I should mind my own business!

I watched the needle as it swung slowly to the left. When it finally indicated a heading of 90° to our left, I called again, telling the leader I would give him five minutes to change course. If he did not, I was going to make my own turn to preserve our skins! Within a minute, he made a 90° turn to our left. As I followed him, my compass needle pointed dead ahead to Fortaleza.

The navigator's sloppy work really made the other guys sweat. Although I had plenty of gas, due to my "cleaner" plane without its guns, the others landed in the dusk "on the fumes". We were all disgusted with the so-called "expert" navigator. He had added an extra hour to our flight due to carelessness.

Nevertheless, we had successfully crossed the Atlantic and the equator. It was a long flight without a co-pilot, but it was also a very beautiful day. Flying a very loose formation (as much as 300 feet between ships) made it very relaxing compared to our combat missions.

I think that we heard about the first atomic bomb being used against Hiroshima while we were at Fortaleza. At that time, we had no idea how it would hasten the end of the war.

The next leg took us northeast along the coast of Brazil to Georgetown, British Guyana. Although this leg was uneventful, the northeast coast of South America was really beautiful. The sea was a deep blue to our right and lush, green jungle stretched away to the horizon on our left. It appeared to be an impenetrable blanket of trees so dense that we could not see the jungle floor. Below us, narrow beaches outlined the stark difference between sea and jungle. Many rivers broke the shoreline. The most impressive, of course, was the huge delta of the Amazon. Here, the tan, muddy water of the river met and mixed with the blue of the sea. At each town or city there was a clearing carved out of the jungle, with room for farming around the perimeter.

Leaving Georgetown, we flew 900 miles to Puerto Rico. This was also a fantastically beautiful trip. Flying up the coast to the delta of the Orinoco River, we turned north, following the chain of islands, which defined the eastern edge of the Caribbean Sea. These included Trinidad, Grenada, Barbados, Martinique, Dominica, Antigua, and the Virgin Islands. These emerald green islands, with their white beaches, were like a fine necklace, running from south to north and then around to the west toward Puerto Rico. Each little island became capped with puffy white clouds. The shallower waters were a light jade green and surf ringed the islands on the windward side.

Puerto Rico was delightful. Although the temperature stayed in the eighties, a steady sea breeze made it feel much cooler. The base seemed

exceptionally neat and I found myself thinking that it must have been a great place to be stationed.

Our last leg was from Puerto Rico to Savannah, Georgia, a distance of about 1,300 miles. We skirted the Dominican Republic and Haiti, following the Bahamas' chain of islands. Again, it was a beautiful day. The cover photo was taken as we passed the last islands. When we were about three hours out of Savannah, we heard a radio broadcast that the Japanese were giving up. I don't think that day was actually V-J Day – that was celebrated a few days later. But the report was good enough for us. We jinked our planes all over the sky in celebration!

As one might imagine, the base at Savannah was in confusion. Here we were, on our way to the Pacific Theatre of Operations, and the war was over! As I recall, we stayed two or three days to get things sorted out.

The first operation was to turn in all of our combat gear. Parachute, heavy boots, winter flying jacket and pants, summer flight suit, long johns, Colt .45 automatic, and aircraft flight log. I somehow managed to keep my hackwatch and B-2 leather jacket.

Chapter XI

The Extra Year

After a big meeting, I decided to take the offer of separation and received orders to go to Camp Grant, Illinois, Separation Center, after a 45-day leave. I got a flight to Chicago, where Lois met me at the airport. What a hug!

About this time, I began to wonder just what I might do when I separated from the Army. I enquired at Wheaton College, where I was informed that I would have to attend summer school in 1946 in order to get some decent grades before they would let me re-enroll. I did not like this.

Lois and I decided to take a second honeymoon. We took a train (my, how they improved once the war was over!) to Denver, Colorado. We had a private, sleeper compartment, which was very comfortable, and the meals were excellent. From Denver, we took a bus to Rocky Mountain National Park, where we rented a cabin. We spent a glorious week there, enjoying the beauty of the mountains and the variety of wildlife.

When we returned, I checked in at Camp Grant, anticipating a discharge. The C.O. of the Air Corps Liaison Center called me to his office, where he asked me if I really wanted to separate from the service. When I asked why he asked such a question, he indicated that he needed one more officer to help with his program of counseling Air Corps personnel as they left the service. I requested a short delay for my answer, and after consulting with Lois, we decided to stay in for a while.

I was assigned to the unit and we rented a small apartment in Rockford. Lois' father somehow convinced the Ford dealer in Wheaton to sell us his first available car and we obtained a neat little 2-door V-8. We spent six good months in Rockford, having plenty of opportunities to visit Lois' folks in Wheaton.

The job at Camp Grant was really easy. There was no flying at the base, but I did get to fly National Guard AT-6's at Madison, Wisconsin in order to earn my flight pay. My most vivid memory of the program at Camp Grant is that we had a great lounge in our building, where I worked on improving my ping-pong skills! I was so good that I got my promotion to Captain!

The job at the Separation Center was naturally destined to end as the number of separatees dwindled rapidly. In May, I received orders to move to Eglin Field, Florida, an Air Corps research base. Since Lois was pregnant, and housing in Florida was minimal, I went down and took Bachelor Officers' Quarters on base.

This assignment was great for me, since I could fly to Chicago on "training" flights about once every two weeks. Furthermore, I was back flying A-26's and B-25's, which I loved.

All of our working flights at Eglin were hush-hush secret experiments. I wouldn't even know what it was we were testing. The base had a huge lagoon, where we dropped dozens of secret things in the water from low altitude. I never learned if they hit the target, blew up, or just sank! To this day, I don't know what we were doing, but it was fun!

The trips to Chicago were great for my morale. We had this signal system, where I would fly over Lois' home in Wheaton (at a legal 1,000 feet), circle once or twice, and then head for the airport, whereupon Lois would drive in and pick me up.

We always took as many Air Corps personnel as the plane would hold. On one trip, I had a very pompous Lieutenant aboard. He was a "paddle foot" (a ground officer of some kind) who had not done much flying. Before we took off, he was sort of pushing everyone around in a bossy fashion. He asked me where he should sit for the best view, so I put him in the bombardier's bubble in the nose of our A-26C.

The trip was uneventful, but when I got over Lois' house in Wheaton, I was at about 4,000 feet. Instead of dropping down gently to 1,000 feet for my circle of the house, I abruptly went into an almost vertical dive, pulling out at the 1,000-foot level doing about 350 MPH! Then, I came back and did my circles. The guy in the jump seat next to me could see into the bubble ahead and he was laughing like crazy. He demonstrated to me what had happened ahead. Pointing into the front compartment, he then braced his hands and feet on the ceiling and walls of our cockpit, with a wild look in his eyes! I can't remember if the guy rode back with us or not.

On another flight (in a B-25), I was told to go to the air base in Dayton, Ohio to pick up a V.I.P. The weather was becoming unsettled, with scattered thundershowers approaching the base.

As I taxied up to the Operations Building, a ground crewman directed me to park, but leave the engines running. Almost immediately, an officer trotted out to our plane. We let down the little belly access ladder just ahead of the bomb bay and he climbed in. Taking off his coat, he said, "Move over, Captain, I'll fly the ship." Danged if he wasn't a two-star general! And he was old! Probably at least 14 years younger than I am as I write this! Due to the two stars, my co-pilot moved into the well, I moved into the right seat, and the general took over. I don't recall his name.

Right away it became apparent that this guy hadn't been in a B-25 in a long time. He just looked confused and uncertain. During run-up at the end of the runway, he had to look for the mag switches. This was not a good sign!

He had me set the flaps for takeoff and we were on our way. He kind of jerked the plane into the air, but it flew, and we started our climb. As we turned south on our course to Eglin, it became apparent that a huge line of thunderstorms blocked our path ahead. Noting that there was a break in the clouds to the northwest, I suggested a big detour around and under the clouds. The general shook his head, indicating that he just had to get to this meeting on

time. Although I thought that getting anywhere on the ground was more important than any meeting, I demurred to his rank, and off we went into the teeth of the storm.

That turned out to be the mother of all storms! We entered the nasty-looking clouds at about 6,000 feet. Within seconds, we hit an "elevator", which took us to 9,000 feet. This was immediately followed by someone hitting the "down" button and we were suddenly at 7,000 feet. Then 10,000 feet followed by 8,000 feet. We went from almost total darkness to too-brilliant (and close) flashes of lightning. I had been watching the instruments closely and it was apparent that the aircraft was not just going dramatically up and down; we were close to out of control. I looked over at the major general. He had this grim look on his face and he was holding on for dear life. He caught me looking at him and I could see him giving up. I knew that it was a huge blow to his pride when he said, "Captain, will you please take over? This is a bit beyond me."

I took over the controls and started a very difficult battle with the elements. I knew that we were much too far into the storm to turn around – we would have to fight our way through. We flew through lightning, very heavy rain, and some hail! We went up to about 15,000 feet – without oxygen (normally required above 10,000 feet). This was by far the most difficult instrument flying I ever did, but finally we climbed high enough to find a hole between the extremely high anvil tips of the storm. Once beyond the storm clouds, the air became crisply clear and flying was smooth. We flew over a beautiful cloud deck the rest of the way.

The general never said another word and I also held my peace. I did not offer to let him land. I think he made his important meeting, but that did not dissipate my feelings of resentment that he would choose to endanger our lives.

About this time, we started to hear talk about the Army Air Corps being replaced by a new branch – the U.S. Air Force. I had applied for "regular" status and had taken a battery of tests.

The birth of our son, Jim, in late August, made me begin to think harder about whether I really wanted to stay in the service as a career. Neither Lois nor I were great socializers, so the rank-conscious social requirements of peacetime service didn't have much appeal.

In September, I made a big mistake: Our Squadron Supply Officer left the service and I was named to replace him. He and the Supply Sergeant presented me with a sheaf of papers, which I was asked to sign. I readily agreed, much to my chagrin later. I casually noticed that they listed such insignificant things like aircraft, trucks, jeeps, and carry-alls.

In early November, all officers were given an opportunity to be discharged. After talking with Lois, I signed up to leave and on November 30, 1946, I became a civilian again.

There was only one catch. On the 29th, a replacement officer was named to replace me as Squadron Supply Officer. The Supply Sergeant and I dutifully presented the new guy with the sheaf of papers, asking for his signatures. His response was, "Where are they?"

"I mean, I will not sign anything until we take a full inventory of everything on the list," the troublemaker said.

Well, we had one exciting day! We towed an airplane back from another squadron. We stole back a jeep, which had been stolen from us weeks before. A truck was found somewhere out in the boonies where some driver had left it. Although it was time-consuming, the big stuff was really easy.

We were counting radios and other small equipment and I knew that we would never find everything on the list. Turning to the sergeant, I said,

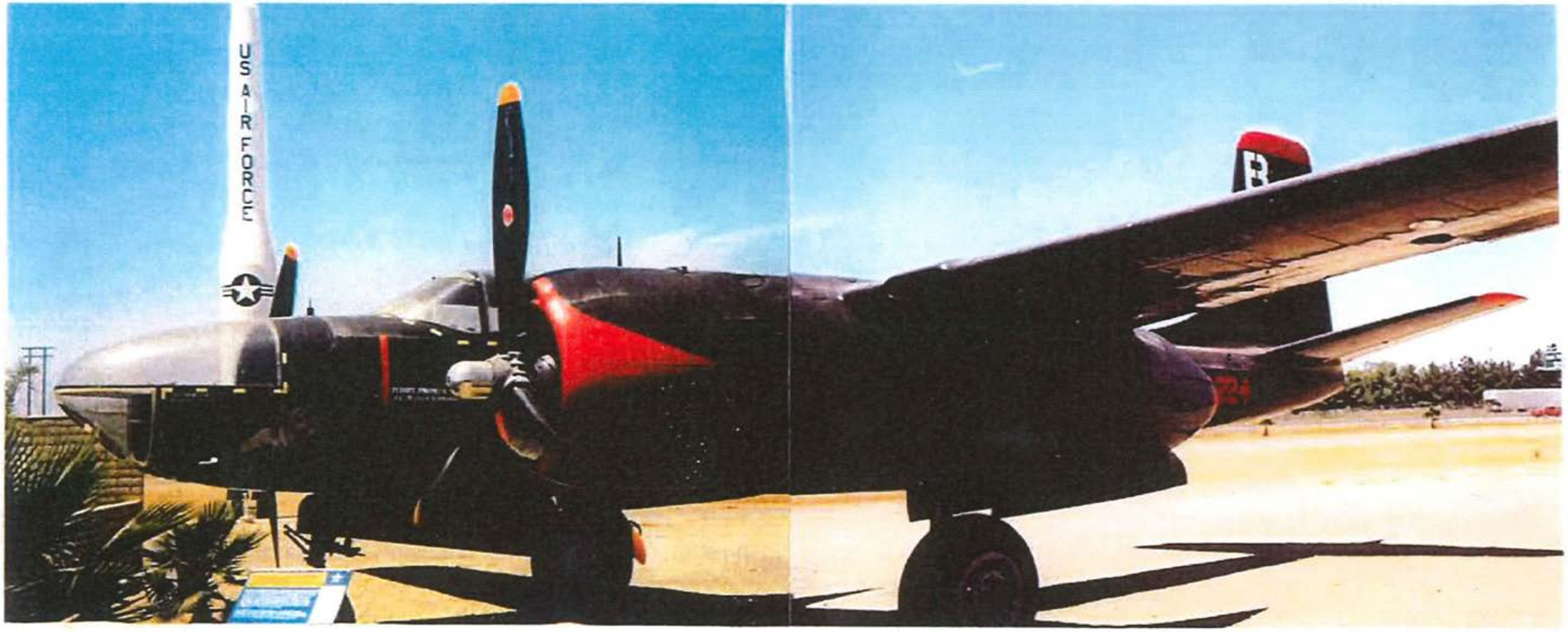
"Sergeant, tomorrow morning I'll be a civilian. How in the world can we resolve our dilemma?"

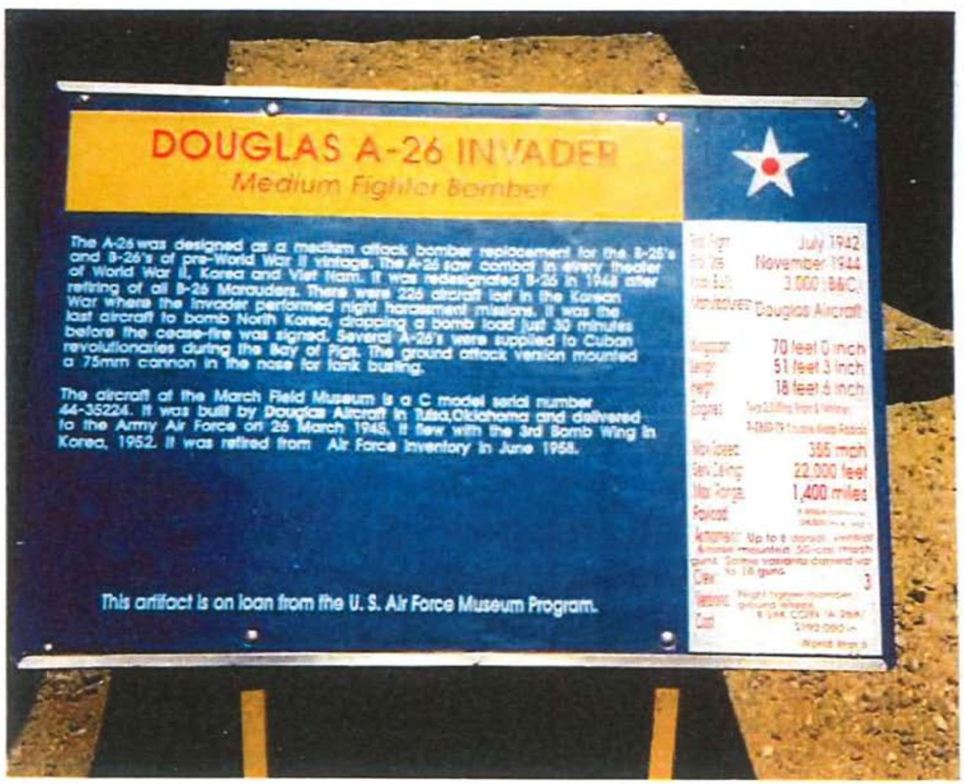
He replied, "Captain, I have an idea. Follow me."

I went with him to his office, where he picked up some forms. His clerk took about an hour to complete the list of missing items. We took all the forms and went by jeep to the far edge of the base, where there was a civilian-run salvage yard. The yard was a huge, fenced-in enclosure full of junk – mostly aluminum and steel. The sergeant had obviously done business with the salvage manager before. Looking intently at the man, the sergeant asked him to review the long list of missing equipment. He then gave him a blank form.

The manager said, "Well, Sergeant, that list of yours obviously amounts to two tons of miscellaneous junk, which you had trucked over here yesterday!" He then filled out the form (in triplicate, of course), signed it, and attached it to the list of missing items. This satisfied the inventory and the new Supply Officer. I thanked the sergeant profusely for getting me off the hook and the next morning, I drove north toward home and family. Thus, ending my time in the service!

Those were really 4-¾ glorious years – years when we really felt "held by the right hand of the Lord".


US AIR FORCE


DOUGLAS A-26 INVADER
Medium Fighter Bomber
The A-26 was designed as a medium attack bomber replacement for the B-25's and B-26's of pre-World War II vintage. The A-26 saw combat in every theater of World War II, Korea and Viet Nam. It was redesignated B-26 in 1948 after retiring of all B-26 Marauders. There were 226 aircraft lost in the Korean War where the Invader performed night harassment missions. It was the last aircraft to bomb North Korea, dropping a bomb load just 30 minutes before the cease-fire was signed. Several A-26's were supplied to Cuban revolutionaries during the Bay of Pigs. The ground attack version mounted a 75mm cannon in the nose for tank busting.
The aircraft at the March Field Museum is a C model serial number 44-35224. It was built by Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa, Oklahoma and delivered to the Army Air Force on 26 March 1945. It flew with the 3rd Bomb Wing in Korea, 1952. It was retired from Air Force inventory in June 1958.
This artifact is on loan from the U. S. Air Force Museum Program.
July 1942
November 1944
3,000 (B&C)
Manufacturer Douglas Aircraft
70 feet 0 inch
51 feet 3 inch
18 feet 6 inch
385 mph
22,000 feet
1,400 miles
Payload
Armament: Up to 8
Crew 3
Cost


416th BOMBARDMENT GROUP (L)
WORLD WAR II - EUROPEAN THEATER
1943 - - 1945
A26 INVADER - FIRST GROUP IN THE WORLD
A20 HAVOC - FIRST 9th AIR FORCE GROUP IN ETO
SQUADRONS
668th
669th - HQ - 670th
671st
- Support Units -
4th Ser. Grp. - 79th Sta. Comp. - 199 Med. Det. - Red Cross
21st Weather - 1267 Mil. Police
Dedicated in Memory of the Gallant 416th Airmen and
Diligent Support Personnel Whose Supreme Sacrifices
Aided in Preserving Freedom Throughout The World.

Postscript

Looking back has altered my view of those historic war years. At the time, I was in my own realm of training, teaching, and combat. Now, I have a more global perspective.

While I was a Cadet, talented people were designing and building the excellent A-26 and B-29 aircraft that my brother and I flew. At the same time, a huge training program was turning out pilots, aircrews, and ground maintenance personnel.

By the summer of 1942, our B-24 and B-17 bombers and P-40 fighters were very active in North Africa. Concurrently, there was a huge buildup in the Pacific.

American factories, which had built cars, now produced tremendous quantities of aircraft, tanks, trucks, and guns. The shipbuilding industry exploded. In every endeavor, women joined the workforce. It was truly a dynamic time, when the nation was united as never before, or since.

How times have changed! In reviewing the old places, I find the following to be true: The Santa Ana Center, in California, is now a fairground. The airfields at Visalia and Stockton, California are now municipal airports. Minter Field at Merced, California became Minter Air Force Base, where B-52's were stationed. Mather Field outside of Sacramento, California also became an Air Force Base, but closed just a few years ago.

In the summer of 1976, I drove through the towns of Marfa and Alpine, Texas. The only sign that there had ever been a training base in that high country was a small bronze plaque by the edge of the highway. Curiously, the country, which Lois and I both thought of as dry and brown high desert, was a brilliant green. The towns themselves seemed unchanged, except for the lack of service personnel.

As the memories fade, I rejoice that we had the opportunity to be a part of that remarkable time.