

## CHAPTER ONE

The first car I can remember was about a 1921 REO Flying Cloud. It was, of course, a company car belonging to the Bearly Lumber Co. I remember Dad saying when he bought a 1936 Chevrolet that it was the first car he had ever owned. All the rest had been company cars. It was a huge four-door sedan, or at least huge to me. Very boxy looking with a roll-down curtain for the back window. About all I really remember about the car is that one time it caught fire and my brother drove it to, of all places, a filling station. Drove right up to the pumps as a matter of fact before they ran him off. It was a sort of blue color, as I recall.

In 1928 Bearly got a maroon Hupmobile, another brand no longer on the market. It came complete with a trunk hung on the back of the car. When I was six or thereabouts we took the Hup on the longest trip I had ever made up to the time I was grown. My mother's uncle, Thaddy Caraway, was senior senator from Arkansas at the time so we went off to Washington to visit him. I was too young to remember much about the trip, but some things stick out.

Somewhere in the Blue Ridge Mountains, we stopped at a green-painted roadside place that advertised ham. The lady that ran it was as nice as could be, and had the most frizzy and outrageous red hair that I have ever seen. The ham was so salty I could barely eat it. Before we got to Washington, we stopped at Virginia Beach and everyone went swimming in the Atlantic. We stayed in a very nice hotel for the time, which even had ice water piped to the rooms. I nearly wore out the ice water faucet. Dad got caught in a breaker and sprained his foot.

When we got to Washington, we got a grand tour hosted by Uncle Thaddy. We ate in the Senate dining room and met whoever was vice president at the time. Hoover was president. I got my first look at the Smithsonian wherein was the Spirit of St. Louis along with a lot of other great stuff. We also watched them print money.

The senators have a little underground railway between the office building and the capitol which goes like the wind. I rode it until it made me sick. The part about Washington that I remember best was the drive to Mount Vernon. Janice Lee and I had a ball playing on the dock that sticks out into the Potomac. By the way, if these things bore you, throw them away. It's the only personal history that I will ever do.

The only bad part of the trip was when we were on our way home, as close as Springfield, Missouri, Dad got deathly ill and turned a bright yellow. It was his first gall bladder attack, although he blamed it on eating tomatoes. Not even the doctor could convince him otherwise. That is, until '36, when he had to have his gall bladder removed in an emergency operation.

The place where we almost always went on vacation was Piggott, Arkansas. It's way up in the northeast corner of Arkansas, and was one time was one of two county seats of Clay County, Arkansas. Dad told me that when he was young, Rector was the other

county seat. The reason for two such offices was the fact that the White River created swamps when it flooded and it was hard to get from one end of the county to the other. He used to tell me about the time they moved the county safe from Rector to Piggott. They built a huge sled and loaded the safe, which was then towed by I think it was five or six teams of oxen, across the mud and slime to Piggott. When the sled crossed Sugar Creek, which was right next to where Dad lived, it overturned and the falling safe trapped one of the teamsters underneath it. I used to have my Grandfather's saddle-mounted surgical kit, and Dad always pointed out the saw his father had used to remove the man's legs, since they couldn't move the safe quickly enough to prevent the teamster bleeding out. I think witnessing that emergency amputation ended any medical ambitions my Dad ever cherished.

When I was 10, my grandmother died. We headed out at four in the morning to make the trip because the roads weren't all that good. It took a full 12 hours to get to Piggott, and Janice Lee and I were usually fighting by the time we got there. My mother and I once made the trip by train. We always ate breakfast in Checotah, Oklahoma, always at the same place, where the man served, of all things, Karo Corn Syrup with his pancakes. I got to the point where I ordered corn flakes. Karo is horrible. There was a restaurant in Fort Smith, Arkansas, where we never stopped, that advertised all through Oklahoma that it served Dinty Moore Beef Stew. It was named after a comic strip character and I always wanted desperately to eat there. But of course we never did. Just drove straight through and always ate lunch at a little place connected to a Sinclair station where Dad bought gas. Since this was the Depression and things weren't all that great, there was one stretch of the highway I will always remember. It was between Russellville and, I think, Conway, Arkansas. One side was paved and the other was gravel. Dad would drive on the pavement until he met another car, then he would pull off onto the gravel. On one trip, it was raining pretty hard the whole way. The old Hup was leaky, and my Mom kept getting a shoe full of water.

We would get to Grandma's about dinnertime. She had a wood-burning cookstove in the kitchen, which was where we always ate. It kept the room quite warm in the summer. It was what was known as an "L-shaped shotgun house," three rooms running north and south attached to two rooms running east and west. Inside the "L" was a porch, and another porch ran across the front of the house. Added at the east end of the porch was a bathroom with no heater and no hot water. The water was heated in a reservoir on the kitchen stove and mixed with the cold water that came out of the tap. Water for laundry and washing dishes was also heated in the reservoir, which must have held about 10 gallons.

Grandma had what was called a "woods lot," about two acres filled with elderly trees on the east, bordered by Sugar Creek on the west, and containing a barn that I always considered spooky. About the only thing grown on the land was popcorn planted by my Uncle Sam, and it was always good. Most of the time, since Uncle Sam

rarely had a job, he, my Aunt Nid, and cousin Jean lived with Grandma. Aunt Nid was the cook and probably the best one who ever lived, given her limited facilities. Jean always had a job to go with a not-too-pleasant temper. Uncle Sam spent a lot of time sitting on the porch and smoking. He was really good at that.

Aunt Nid had been a Parrish, one of the really big families in the county. She had some relatives, one of whom I always called Uncle Joe, who owned a grocery store while his wife, whose name I can't recall, had a dress store next door. They allowed me to hang around the grocery store, and Saturdays were really fun. Before dawn the wagons would come squeaking into town and park behind the livery stable across Sugar Creek. I would go to Uncle Joe's store and people-watch, and once in a while they would let me candle eggs that the farmers brought in to swap for groceries. It was the high point of the week.

One time when we went there Grandma rented a pony and a cart for Janice Lee and I, and we toured the county. The pony was the only horse who ever kicked me. Then one time they rented an old gray horse for me and another kid and I rode the poor thing almost to death. I have never been much of a hand with horses, always considering them unfriendly beasts at best. But this was a polite horse and quite elderly.

Like I said, Grandma died just before I turned 11, but Dad and I still made the trip a couple of times a year. Then, when we left Piggott, we would head down to Memphis where the Bruce Flooring Company was, and I would goof around the hotel while Dad did business, then head for home.

The '28 Hup lasted until February of 1934, when Dad was on his way home when he was broadsided at 14th and Hudson by a Pierce-Arrow limousine. That set the tone for a very long summer. His hip was broken into six pieces, three ribs were torn away from his backbone and his collarbone was broken. He faced three months in a cast from belt to toe on his left leg and knee-length on his right leg. Mother always insisted on saying "90 days," since that sounded shorter than three months.

We moved a hospital bed into the front living room and set about getting him back on his feet. He had another gall bladder thing while laid up and both Dix and his friend Hammett hand-cranked the bed up and down most of the night; every time Dad wanted to throw up. He spent the spring in a cast, the summer on crutches and most of the rest of his life walking with a cane and a decided limp. Not daunted, he opened the Oran Huston Lumber Co. in the winter of 1937 and was off and running.

My first job at the yard was not all that pleasant. After I got through using a shovel (I was 12 at the time and weighed about 80 pounds) helping to dig the footings for the shed, Dad allowed me to break up concrete chunks he had acquired to gravel the drive. It probably didn't hurt me but I certainly felt put-upon.

The first truck was a '37 Ford ton-and-a-half and on this machine I really learned how to drive. I had driven Dad, when he was on crutches, in the '34 Ford two-door that had replaced the Hup. We would go out into the country, I would carry his gun and

mine along with a camp stool for him to sit on and then try to run rabbits past him. It took a cushion behind me and a cushion under my rear to be able to drive that thing, but it worked. Our first truck driver, Shorty Winkleman, taught me how to really drive. He was the best I ever saw, Neither of us ever put a scratch on the '37 Ford, which had blue fenders and a white body. The Ford served Oran Huston Lumber Company for several years until the water pump went out and Dad decided he didn't want to spend the money to fix it. It was parked next to the main shed for decades, slowly rusting away.

In those days the guy who rode around with the truck driver and helped the driver load and unload was known as a swamper. Why I have no idea. I do know that I enjoyed being a swamper a lot more than I enjoyed being a rock-breaker for the most obvious of reasons. You got to sit down when you were riding around in a truck. Shorty Winkleman started me out moving the truck around the yard. By the time I was 14, I was a full-blown driver. No matter that the minimum age was 18. Things like that meant very little to my father.

I attended Oklahoma City public schools, graduated from Harding Junior High and Classen High School, where I played no sports, being one of those people who had absolutely no athletic ability whatsoever. I was a trumpet player in the band. One on occasion, all the bands in Oklahoma City participated in the parade for the 30th anniversary of statehood. One of my bandmates dropped his trumpet mouthpiece in a pile of horse manure. For some reason, he didn't actually play his instrument for the rest of the parade.

I graduated in 1941 and started college at the University of Oklahoma that fall. Back near the dawn of time, prior to World War II, all reasonably healthy young males who were attending land grant colleges were required to enroll in ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) programs no matter their military inclinations. My interest in things of a martial nature were, to put the best face on it, minimal.

At the University of Oklahoma, the basic course was in Field Artillery, HORSE-DRAWN Field Artillery at that. Aside from the inherent discomfort of horseback riding, we were clothed, even in the hot fall and spring months, in wool OD uniforms, complete with riding pants, high lace boots, wool shirts and blouses with only the boots even approximating a fit. About the best thing you could say about the uniform was that once you got out of basic you could sell your boots to Morris Tannenbaum, the local used clothing dealer, for eleven bucks, cash.

For those who were lax in their duties, especially when it came to cutting the two hours of close-order drill held every Tuesday afternoon, a system of demerits had been devised. To work off such demerits, one got to take a shovel and a broom (push, sweep, with handle) and clean up after the horses that pulled the French 75s and caissons used by the detachment. Since I preferred to spend Tuesday afternoons at the Sooner

Snooker Shop I developed a rather close relationship with one end of these animals. If one failed to show up for stable detail, further demerits were earned.

On my way to the distinction of being the only person in the history of the University of Oklahoma to flunk military science, I had the privilege of not one but two interviews with the professor of military science and tactics (PMS&T). He was a balding gentleman who looked like a bank clerk, but still had the silver chickens on his shoulders. On my last conversation with him, he said, with some heat, "Huston, you'll never be an officer!"

"No, sir," I said.

"Huston, you'll never even be a PFC!" he shouted.

"I hope not, sir," I said.

"Goddammit, Huston, you're no soldier!" he said with finality.

"Yes, sir," I answered, knowing he was right on all three points.

Some two months after this unsatisfactory interview I joined the Army Air Corps, where, although they had no horses except for those portions that showed up in the mess hall, they did have an all-inclusive demerit system for those of us in the Aviation Cadet program.

## CHAPTER TWO

It was the summer of 1942 and patriotism was running more or less rampant. At the time I was working at the best-paying job I had ever had, and the only one with the a title to boot: I was Materials Expediter and Coordinator, Areas 1 and 3, for the contractors building Tinker Field, known then as Midwest Air Depot. And they paid a whole \$24 a week. I was hard-pressed to waste it all, believe me.

At the time, I was madly in love with a girl who was pure pacifist (maybe not, but averse to what were considered dangerous occupations) , one Marjorie Marshal. Several of us had been talking about joining up and Marjorie was adamantly opposed. So much for feminine opposition. I took off one day (you got a day off for every month worked at Tinker) and headed for the recruiting station. With several high school classmates, we had heard of a new program offered by the Air Corps which we knew was a fraud but figured it would swing out mothers over. I was the baby of the group, being barely 18. My long-time friend, Clarence Martin, now on the faculty at OSU, has never forgiven me for talking him into going with us.

The recruiting station was located on one of the upper floors of the old main post office and Third and Robinson, and on this particular July day things were pretty quiet, so we got sudden service from the master sergeant on duty. It turned out the recruiting officer was a captain named Green who had been a science teacher at Taft Junior High and a former neighbor of mine, so we were at least among friends. His assistant, a second lieutenant of infantry, was not, however, in the least friendly. One got the impression he was sorry to have missed the fall of Bataan and Corregidor the preceding spring.

We were taken to a courtroom, given three sharp pencils and a test booklet. We were told that we weren't supposed to cheat and that in a mere two hours the non-com would be back to get the tests, although he had little hope that people such as we could ever pass the thing. We were children of privilege, obviously, and the Air Corps was looking for men with skill and the guts to fly, as they put it on the posters, with the greatest team in the world. The exact terminology was "Fly and Fight with the Greatest Team in the World."

The test took about half as long as advertised, the questions were multiple choice and therefore quite easy to do provided one could think at all. The non-com took up the tests, counted the pencils as though they were the family silver, and told us to report back at 1400 hours, which he kindly translated for us as two in the afternoon.

We all went down Robinson to a place between Grand and Main known as Martin's, had a great lunch, then back to the post office. Martin's was known for blocks around for its great apple pie.

The infantry officer called us in one by one to advise us, with some bitterness, that he had passed, naturally. He gave us a permission to enlist form to take home to our parents, and we were told to report the next morning at 0730 at the Shrine Temple on Fourth Street for our physicals. Now we get into the fraudulent bit.

The Air Corps offered this great deal: Sign up now and be allowed to complete your college education. We knew it was a scam; our fathers all knew it to be a scam; but mothers back in those days had this tendency to believe what they were told by the government. With the help of our fathers and this ironclad guarantee that we could all go back to school our mothers all suckered. We got the required signatures.

Bright and early the next morning we were on hand to take the physical. In those days there were two physicals, both named for the form number on the bottom of the page. The 63, always known as the "six-three," was for the walking army. Hardly any defect known to medical science would cause a person to flunk the six-three. The other was for the flying army and was known as the six-four. We were to take the six-four, which was considerably more stringent than that required of foot soldiers. There we were, a long line of erect, pink animals, papers in hand, being told to cough and being thumped and pounded in various places. When we were allowed to dress, we then got our eyes checked (my high school band director was checking for color acuity), were asked if we like girls or did we prefer boys, all the dumb stuff, It took all morning to go through the mill.

There was one bit of comic relief that spread like wildfire through our ranks. For some unknown reason they had a box marked "Sex" on the form, although we were all obviously of the male persuasion. The girl at the typewriter never looked up and when my friend Sidney Gasser, just in front of me in line, was asked, "Sex?" He answered, "Occasionally." The girl blushed as girls were wont to do in that dim and distant day.

Only two of us, Gasser and myself, got the bad news. We didn't weigh enough for our height. We were told to go stuff ourselves and come back about 1600 for a recheck. Gasser and I deserted the mob, drove to the White House at 16th and Classen (six tiny burgers for a dollar). We then went to the Orange Julius next to the Criterion Theater and washed down some popcorn with the orange drink. Then to Anna Marie's, where we ate watermelon, all while avoiding the call of nature. We drank buckets of water. We managed to hold off until we went back to the recruiting station. We told the sergeant what we had eaten, and he cleared us without even putting us on the scale, telling us to come back in the morning to be sworn in. After running for the restroom and unloading, Gasser took me up to the lumberyard, where we proceeded to throw up a lot of stuff. I was sick pretty much all night.

The next morning there we were, holding up our hands and swearing (or affirming) that we would make the world safe for the Democrats. With that we were told to go home; if the Air Corps reached a point of total desperation, we would be informed. And

no case could we be called up in less than six months. So much for another fraud. Go back to school, they said, and we would be told if they needed us.

So back to work I went at Tinker, docked one day's pay, breaking up litter trains in the saw yard. I might further mention that when I did this stupid thing, Marjorie Marshal and I were no longer considered to be going steady and her mother and father prayed for me at the First Baptist Church with some degree of regularity. I don't think that it helped.

## CHAPTER THREE

We didn't really get anything good, like a letter that said, "The President of the United States sends you Greetings." Nothing nearly that formal. They called our homes of record and our mothers were supposed to find us. Mine called me at the Phi Kappa Sigma house in Norman where I had been wasting my time as unproductively as possible, along with the rest of the people who signed up when I did. We drank too much, we chased girls (I couldn't catch one) and generally loafed our way through part of the fall semester. Except for a small minority, our scholarly attainments were few. As luck would have it, with the clarion call from the recruiting station, most of us were able to take W's from our courses.

The call advised us to be at the Shrine Temple in Oklahoma City no later than 0730 the following morning, we were to bring the minimum of luggage and be prepared not to go home until Uncle Sam said the war was over. They got 178 of us off the campus at OU that same day. Several fraternity houses were nearly bankrupted as a result. All those house bills left the same day.

We were on hand as instructed early the next day, ready to go to a classification center and become real soldiers. At least that had been the drill up to that time: classification center, preflight, and off into the wild blue. We were disabused of that notion when the recruiting sergeant showed up to call roll.

"The air corpse has a new deal for you people," he said. "No more foolin around at the classification center. The air corpse is gonna make real soldiers out of ya. You will go from here to Sheppard Field for basic trainin and back to school to make ya smart. Now answer up when I calls the roll."

What did we know? Sheppard seemed as good a place as any to begin a military career that was sure to lead to fancy uniforms, glory, and a chest full of medals for aerial derring-do. So we answered up like we were told. We were then loaded onto city buses and taken to Union Station, where we boarded a waiting Frisco train equipped with the oldest passenger cars on the line. Those who had girlfriends and/or wives (very few of the latter) bid them farewell once again, the girls having followed the buses to the station. It was all supposed to be very secret but I am virtually sure the German High Command knew of our departure for Sheppard and called in more reserves.

The pulled out about nine and we were on our way. The weather had turned a bit nippy, but the railroad didn't care. The heating systems in the cars were of two minds, both evil. Either you sat and shivered or you lay gasping on the floor, soaked with sweat. Down we wandered through Chickasha, Lawton (where Fort Sill was a reception center for the ground army, so we were briefly worried), Altus (where we saw real airplanes on a real air base), and finally to Quanah, Texas, where the Frisco delivered us to the Fort Worth and Denver, which had absolutely no idea we were coming. They finally scrounged up an engine, which took a couple of hours; we had

been served a lunch of sorts but there was nothing for dinner. We were told we would be fed when we arrived at Sheppard, and the authorities wouldn't let us off the train even to hunt up a candy bar.

At 2:30 the following morning, we pulled into Wichita Falls, tired, dirty, hungry, and disillusioned with the Army and the railroads. We were as much a surprise to the station agent at Wichita Falls as we had been to the one at Quanah, and evidently no one at Sheppard had been informed we were coming. So there we sat until about four, when trucks came roaring up accompanied by the usual bunch of loud-mouthed staff sergeants, yelling to make sure we understood they were in charge. We got off the train, had the roll called again to make sure nobody had deserted, loaded up and were hauled directly to the dispensary. There we underwent the first of about 10,000 short-arm inspections I endured in the Army, this one conducted by a doctor who thought he was witty. Tired, grumpy, and hungry as we were, we failed to share his opinion. They marched us to the mess hall where we had our first experience with SOS (creamed chipped beef on toast). We were then herded to barracks in the 401st TSS, were issued sheets, blankets, mattress cover, and comforters, along with a pillow about the size of a postage stamp. Now, we thought, we will get some rest. Not so. Reveille had sounded, we were told, and no one at Sheppard was allowed in his bunk during the day, by order of the colonel commanding. The rumor was that this particular colonel had been a two-star general at the time of Pearl Harbor, but had been absent from his duty post on the day of the attack, doing Christmas shopping in San Francisco. He was not likely to get his stars back, but he was hell-bent on being a hardnose while he still had some rank left.

Soon the squadron staff sergeant came in, and he was the only decent human being we met during our stay at Sheppard. He was from California, he was witty, clever, and honesty human. He clued us in on the base, how make up our bunks, and told us the places to avoid lest we get caught out of bounds. Someone asked about uniforms, and he informed us that none were available at Sheppard since most folks came through a reception center and were outfitted there. My mother had read somewhere, probably in one of her women's magazines, that all one needed to go into the Army was a change of underwear and a ten dollar bill. That was exactly what I had, and some of the others in the group were less well-prepared than I was. They didn't have the extra underwear. Since we had skipped the reception center, we had to make do with what were wearing until the foul-up was straightened out. This was not the first example of what we came to realize was "Army efficiency." So for more than a week we wandered around in increasingly ripe and filthy civvies, trying to look like soldiers and hearing the constant cry from those who had been there for any period longer than ourselves, "You'll be soooooo!" To which the rejoinder was, "Never as sorry as you!"

A truck convoy finally arrived from Fort Sam Houston, carrying our long-awaited clothing. We were issued a Class A uniform, two pairs of shoes, two sets of fatigues,

and some underwear, the quantity of which I can't remember. We also received what was then known as a "battle jacket" and a thick wool overcoat that weighed roughly a hundred pounds. We first donned the overcoat when we were told to fall in in overcoats, dogtags and shoes for a partial pay. When we wonderingly complied, it turned out to be another short-arm inspection. When or how any of us could have contracted a social disease I don't know, but it seemed to be the Army's chief concern. This partial pay elicited the comment from my father that it was cheaper to keep me in college than in the Army.

Our barracks non-com was a short, fat, hillbilly corporal who habitually referred to our Army shoes as "slippers." We said the Army issued him the first pair of shoes he ever owned. But none of us ever forgot our drill instructor, a semi-literate cretin from Minnesota named Swanson, a staff sergeant by the grace of wartime expansion. Since most of us in the 401st TSS had been in field artillery ROTC, we didn't know the manual of arms. Antiquated French 75s, sure, but Springfield rifles, no. This distressed Staff Sergeant Swanson no end. It made him angry, so angry he would rant, rave, and finally throw his Springfield on the ground and stomp on it. When he found out we had taken our second round of vaccinations, he decided that we should take a little road hike to the Red River; at the end there were barely enough trucks on the base to haul all the drop-outs back to the hospital. Swanson was not popular, nor did he like us privileged college boys. He did receive his comeuppance, of which I will speak later. It took more than a year, but two of us who had been his victims finally managed to at least balance the debt.

We learned close order drill (no dodging it this time), the manual of arms, how bad certain kinds of toxic gases could smell, to stay away from the hospital at Sheppard at all costs, and if you had a toothache, keep it to yourself. We also discovered that one avoided officers of high rank at any cost and that it was dumb to goof off at the PX on the flight line. Bob Mardt tried it and wound up spending two days marching around a square carrying a full field pack and his rifle as well. All of us had racking coughs by the time we had been at Sheppard for two weeks, but only Jack Newbill turned in for sick call. Jack found the MD in charge was a colonel who thought that the Army was being ruined by slackers like Jack who turned in sick when he only had a temperature of 103. Newbill escaped by putting his thermometer in a glass of ice water while the nurse wasn't looking. Sheppard was also within constant smelling distance of the Wichita Falls sewage treatment plant, a continual reminder of our new status in life. I won't venture to comment on the irony. The thing I remember most about Sheppard was the total confusion, and how they did their best to be tough when toughness was not required.

For some reason, while learning to march in step and smell poison gas and eat barely digestible food, we spent several days learning to use the bayonet. I never saw another bayonet in my entire military career. We also fired the Springfield and some of

us managed to hit the target. We were taught the use of the sling (the hasty sling is the only one I remember, and I never figured out how anyone could hit anything tied up like that). We also had the first of many first aid courses, which should have made us think.

After the usual two-week quarantine (there was, in addition, an outbreak of spinal meningitis at Sheppard, which makes me think it was under some sort of biblical curse), we were allowed to visit Wichita Falls, which in those days wasn't much. There were, however, places there that served edible food, and my friend Clarence Martin somehow knew some people there who had daughters. They were nice girls, and their parents were also good to us.

We were finally told, after about three weeks, that our bunch had been chosen for a pilot program, soon to be implemented throughout the Air Corps, to see if we couldn't be the leanest, toughest, smartest fighting men ever produced. With the food as it was at Sheppard, we were sure to be the leanest. Tough and smart, we had no idea. Our stay at Sheppard under the supervision of Staff Sergeant Swanson, who had earned the sobriquet "The Minnesota Miscarriage," was supposed to last six weeks, but at the end of four we were told to pack our barracks bags and get ready to move on. We were to open, we were told, the first College Training Detachment, but no one would tell us where. Naturally we speculated, and rumor located the CTD everywhere from Harvard to Southeast Louisiana State. No one guessed right, as it turned out, and after another short-arm inspection we loaded our barracks bags, both way over gross and we learned the first hard lesson about changing bases. It has always been interesting to me that no matter how you loaded a barracks bag, no matter how many layers of clothes you put around your shoes or other sharp objects, they always worked their way to the outside so they could gouge you in some tender portion of your anatomy. Coupled with the fact that the ropes cut into your shoulder and we were all still suffering with the Sheppard cough, the two-mile hike to the railroad track was far from pleasant. In most places I was forced to visit in my Army career, there was no station or platform. You got on or off a troop train in the middle of a field, where transportation may or may not have been provided.

So we boarded our train, once again equipped with chair cars that had been retired from regular service years before. The crap games and blackjack began immediately, but at least this time the train had a mess car, so we wouldn't be half-starved by the time we got to our undisclosed destination. It turned out to be the only college in the world at least 200 miles from the nearest girl, no matter what direction one took.

## CHAPTER FOUR

It turned out that we were bound for College Station, Texas, home of Texas A&M University, where we would be military guinea pigs. The plan was to send all prospective aviation cadets back to school to learn math, English, a little weather, what was then known as the Civil Aeronautics Administration regulations, and subject the student to some time in a light airplane to determine if he had any aptitude as a pilot. We were to be known as "aviation students," which meant our pay increased to \$75 per month, and we were to be under the iron supervision of TAC officers (Training, Advising, and Counseling) who were fresh from the 90-day course at Miami Beach for ground-pounders. Graduates of the the Great OCS in the Sky at Miami Beach seemed destined to make life miserable for enlisted men and cadets. All they knew was close order drill, how to chew people out, and a few of the more pertinent Army regulations. We came to respect these Miami Beach types less and less as time went by. They got their commissions and the concomitant promotions in about a quarter of the time it took us to earn ours, and it seemed to me most of them were pretty chickenshit.

Our train arrived at about dusk at the Southern Pacific depot in College Station. At that time, Aggieland was not co-ed. It was an all-male military school, with nary a female in sight. So far all of our luck had held. We had seen beautiful Wichita Falls and Burkburnett in winter and now we were in a female Sahara. But compared to Sheppard, bleak, smelly, and disorganized, anything was an improvement.

We detrained, had the roll called again, were instructed to fall in alphabetically and were marched to the oldest dorms on the campus. In my case, it was a hall called "Sbisa" and its only virtue was its proximity to the mess hall, or as they called it at A&M, the "dining hall." Why they had this finicky attitude about the name of the place where you ate was beyond me, because we soon learned the Aggie names for food items. You didn't ask for mayonnaise, you asked for elephant cum; mustard was baby shit; meat, no matter the origin, was bull cock; salt and pepper, sand and ..., and the list went on. But it was a dining hall in the Aggie lexicon, and so we referred to it. Whatever they decided to call it, the food was a revelation, especially after the slop they dished out at Sheppard. It was well-prepared and there was plenty of it.

We were assigned three to a room in Sbisa, although some had four to a room. In my room there was an old high school friend named Ralph Jenks and a carpenter from Tulsa, whose first name was Harold, or Howard, I can't recall exactly. We were to find out that Harold was a bodybuilder. After we had been at A&M for a couple of weeks, Harold's wife, whom he had not seen for several months, drove down for a visit. To Harold's credit, he did say hello to the lady before he asked if she had brought his barbells. They were in the trunk, and Harold extracted them and proceeded to do a couple of clean and jerks before he took the luggage out of the car. From then on we

were treated nightly to Harold lifting weights and breathing heavily. When he dropped the weights, the old building shuddered with the strain.

The evening after our arrival, we were all gathered in the Aggie auditorium (oddly, only "auditorium" in Aggiespeak) for a little welcoming speech in which we were told that we were going to leave this place five months hence smarter than hell and a credit, soldier-wise, to the Army Air Corps, and to learn, for God's sake, marching songs, evidently an activity much in favor at the Air Corps OCS at Miami Beach. The TAC officer in charge of teaching us to sing had a good voice, but we were all hoarse from the Sheppard cough and soon there was such a racket of hacking that the TAC officers accused us of being deliberately disruptive. They finally decided that we were really, actually coughing and they allowed the singing to continue. The one about having jolly sixpence will live with me forever. I hated it. The line about having a pocketful of rye was always followed by the undertone, "A hell of a way to carry whiskey."

Our first few days, before classes started, were devoted to learning to march the OCS way. I forget the length of arm swing, but it was negligible, so for a while we marched around pinching the seams of our trousers with our fingers to prevent arm swinging. And all the while we had to sing to show how happy we were to be in the Army. With the exception of the PT instructors, we got the second- and third-best instructors and none of us were too inspired by the education we were receiving. It soon became obvious to most of us that the curriculum at Miami Beach seemed unlikely to shorten the war. However, I was among the lucky few who were chosen to get ten hours of instruction in an Interstate Cadet, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Mix the Army and the Cadet Corps at Texas A&M and you have what could be charitably called a noisy morning. We had people waking us up with police whistles and the Aggies had people with bugles, all giving it hell at about 5:30 in the morning.

The PT folks were another breed. They were all on the varsity coaching staff at A&M and though that all of us were there on athletic scholarships. We did stair laps in the stadium, wearing GI shoes, yet, until we were ready to drop. They also had a nice run all figured out for us, around the school dairy, a matter of a little over two miles. It didn't take long to figure out how to dodge that. Immediately after leaving the starting line, there was a curve that put one out of sight of the instructors. If one ducked into the nearest barn, then sneaked over to the barn nearest the finish, you could see the poor suckers who thought they had to run the full distance. We would wet our shirts from the faucet, wait in the barn for the middle of the pack, slip out and run panting across the finish line. We were never obvious. As I continue this narrative, you will find that PT was not one of my favorite endeavors and I managed to avoid it with some regularity. I was pretty adept, too. Never got caught once.

What I learned at CTD I think you could put in the bottom of a thimble. I was not a studious type anyway, and except for the math course I never cracked a book. The

English, history, and social studies were simple enough for a dimwitted third-grader, although there were a few who struggled.

I discovered trying for pilot's training would be a mistake. I loved to fly the Interstate, spins were fun, stalls were fun, everything about flying the airplane fascinated me, but it was obvious that I was a ham-handed novice and unlikely to develop into anything else. I made one really good landing, cross-wind, even, but the instructor rated me as barely satisfactory. So I decided that once I got to the Classification Center I would do well to try for some other field of endeavor. Had I known then of my eventual fascination with navigation, I would have gone that route, but I opted for bombardier and have yet to regret the decision.

I am sure that the staff officer who dreamed up the CTD was promoted and tremendously proud of his achievement, but for most of us it was complete waste of time. We did get an overnight pass, though, which we spent productively in Dallas, primarily at a place called Abe's and Pappy's. We managed a room at the Baker Hotel through the good offices of Bill Coyle, one of our classmates whose father was part owner in the place. Again, Clarence Martin knew a girl who was a Theta at SMU who had a friend, so we had dates. My date's name was Anne Hall, whose dad owned a hardware store in St. Augustine, Texas. She was right pretty, too.

We blew a month's pay (75 bucks at 1942 prices!) on booze, food and entertainment and it was worth it. It was the only time in my life that I have been afflicted with whiskey burns in my throat and on my lips so I must really have enjoyed myself. Martin wound up sick as a dog and we almost never got him to bed. The trip back on the Southern Pacific was hardly the most enjoyable experience in my life. At that point, I determined hangovers were for others; it took me a few more before I put the resolution fully into effect.

Once again, the course was supposed to last five months, but at the end of the fourth week or thereabout those who had scored best on the GCT at Sheppard were told to pack up and get ready for Classification Center, where we were supposed to go first. I was lucky again, moving out with the first bunch for that golden spot, where we could, within weeks, become real aviation cadets instead of pawns in some strange and foggy Air Corps scheme. And face even meaner and dumber TAC officers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Classification Center in San Antonio would be an electronic gamer's heaven on earth. The Hill, as it was called, or "SAACC", is now Lackland Air Force Base. At that time, it was the usual mishmash of two-story wooden barracks and tar-paper shacks that constituted most wartime installations. The food was slightly better than atrocious and was primarily aimed at enriching the sheep farmers in the Texas hill country, since the chief item on the menu was mutton. It might be noted that The Hill at San Antonio was the place every rattlesnake in Texas congregated. One dared not move in the morning until surroundings were checked for legless reptiles. It also made good sense to shake out one's shoes. And the place had the longest mailing address I ever saw. In my case, it was A/S Fred Huston, 18129919, Barracks something or other, such and such a squadron (I really can't remember them all), San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, Army Air Forces Classification Center, San Antonio, Texas. It took up half the envelope just to put down your return address.

Enlistees sent to the center were subjected to a battery of physical examinations, including the aforementioned Six-Four, and a series of tests to check the potential cadet's manual dexterity and visual acuity. Reaction time, depth perception, peripheral vision, balance – all were tested at SAACC.

The whole classification process took a week. The Friday before we started the main event, we took a day-long battery of written tests. On Monday, we started a couple of days of medical tests. We were poked, probed, scanned, bled, thumped, you name it. One poor fellow who was going through with me was white blonde and one doctor was convinced he had red eyes. All the medicos jumped on him at once, proclaiming him to be an Albino. The kid had never heard of Albinos but he correctly assumed that it wasn't good. They pulled him from the line and he was never seen again. Oddly enough, and this is something I noticed all through my time in the Army, those of us who weren't fitness nuts did the best on the physical exams. The football stars, the All-Americans (two were in the center with me) all seemed to fall by the wayside. Profligates like me who wasted their time drinking beer, chasing girls, and loafing their way through life, rather than meeting it head on and trying to tackle it, fared pretty well. Very few of the athletes made it through the center.

The second part of the week was consumed in what was then called The Million Dollar Penny Arcade. In one test, the subject was required to keep a stylus on one of several contact points located concentrically on a turntable; if he lost contact, a bell went off. In another, the prospective cadet held a metal needle at arm's length inside a small electrified loop. If the needle touched the loop, again with the bell. Ensnared in an aircraft cockpit, the poor guinea pig was faced with an "H"-shaped pattern of lights. He shoved the stick towards the lights as they illuminated, at which point they would go out. In another, little black sticks had to be lined up with a very small allowance for

error. I can't remember all the tests they put us through, but it was exhausting and mentally challenging.

After the week of physicals and other tests we were told to wait around, which was worse than the actual ordeal. They didn't really have anything for us to do. No close order drill, none of the good stuff that we were used to. We were, in the most literal sense, casual troops, so they put us on either KP or guard duty, each worse than the other. The first KP I pulled in the Army was a SAACC. They put a bunch of us on KP for three days at the Officers' Mess, starting at 0300 and ending at about 2000. I got lucky on the first day. I served on the hot line and then got to run the China Clipper (glasses and silverware only) after the meals. This beat getting stuck with pots and pans and the garbage detail, and the mess sergeant left us on the same job for three days. One of the small rewards while serving was to make sure everything on a doctor's plate was completely mixed up, like putting the fruit cocktail in the mashed potatoes and ice cream on the meat.

They let us free in San Antonio three times while we were there, usually on a Tuesday. Now, Tuesdays in 1943 in San Antonio, as part of the war effort, were "Meatless Days." All we could get were cheese sandwiches. We did maintain the tradition that people stationed at the Center had to fall into the San Antonio River while inebriated.

I had one more round of KP (my last), this time in the mess hall where the aviation students more or less ate. Mutton was the main dish, but they did have cold chocolate milk. I drank so much chocolate milk I got sick and was relieved of my duties. I pulled guard one time, watching the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. There were a whole bunch of guys, from first one branch, then that, trying to go through cadets in grade. Not too many of them made it, none to the bombardier school.

When we were classified, toward the end of the third week, all of us were pretty anxious. They gave you three choices, and given my experience with the Interstate Cadet I put down bomb aiming, navigation, and finally pilot. When they found some chump who actually wanted to be a bombardier, there was no hesitation. You got it, man. I got it and they put a bunch of us on orders to depart for the combination Bombardier-Navigator pre-flight at Ellington Field, near Houston. We were, of course, delighted. It was one of those things, though. I will digress for a moment. We seemed to go from the strictest, polish-your-brass, tuck-in-your-chin kind of army into the hooligan army and back again. It kind of shook me up. Sheppard could not be classed as either. It was just another basic training place where you got chewed out no matter what, and they didn't seem to know which way was up. They merely wanted to make sure you could get from one place to another and not get lost in the process. Then we caught CTD and the 90-day wonder TAC officers, who wanted everything just so in their Miami Beach sort of way. Then we ended up at the classification center, where nobody cared as long as you made your appointments that first week. Aside from that

and keeping the barracks clean nobody really gave a damn what you looked like on the base. Classification squadrons were commanded, I'm sure, by an officer of some kind but all we ever saw were non-coms. So we lived like slobs since we could get away with it.

Pre-flight was to be a whole new world. More discipline and more spit-and-polish than any of us knew existed. Thus back to what I guess you could call the real Army. Then to gunnery school, where no one really cared, as long as you learned how to operate the ordnance, then to advanced where you had to shine your shoes and shave every day. Then we got our commissions and no one bothered us any more to speak of anyway.

Classification center was the end of the close-knit, life-long friendship deals, with so many of us who had been together not only in childhood and the teenage years, but in the Army as well. From then on, I lived in a community of virtual strangers. Oh, there were still one or two people I still knew – Mack Jones, for example. Mack and I went to the same places for years, from induction (before that high school) through Advanced, to Salt Lake City, Phase Training, and we even wound up in the same group overseas and finished our tours at about the same time. But it was rare.

Needless to say, the reputation that Ellington was “The Country Club of the Air Corps” was well-known to us. We liked that to say that no one told us we were to be the caddies, but it wasn't so. All of us were excited beyond our wildest dreams as we boarded the Missouri Pacific and headed east for Ellington and finally into the real program. From now until we graduated, we were to be known as Aviation Cadets. The pay was the same, but, boy, the perks were great.

## CHAPTER SIX

Going to Ellington from SACC was a move from the ridiculous to the sublime. Located between Houston and Galveston, Ellington served as pre-flight school for both navigators and bombardiers, and boasted the best food ever served in a military mess hall. Aside from the food, the barracks for the cadets were more like BOQs than barracks. Three to four men to the room, sheets for the beds which were changed every three days and best of all, a town where there were not only girls but friendly people. And we were back in the Army. No more slopping around like a bunch of bums. Shoes were shined, uniforms were pressed (a least for a little while) and you marched every place you went.

The course of study included such things as math and physics, the ubiquitous first aid course, PT, naturally (and how I got out of it here the hard way), code, aircraft identification, military customs, a long list of things we needed to know, or would need to know at some later date. The commandant of cadets was a former character actor in the movies, Capt. Roscoe B. Ates, who was known for his stutter and his utter lack of a chin. We were, of course, herded to the base movie theater shortly after our arrival, to hear the usual welcoming address and get chewed out not for cause but just on general principles.

Ates took the podium and said, in loud, clear tones that although most of us had seen him on the silver screen and laughed at him, here he was no comedian and the first man who laughed at him would be out walking tours. He then proceeded to tell us how tough he was and how mean it was going to be getting through this school and he expected us to emulate, if not duplicate, cadets at West Point. To ensure such behavior, we were informed there would be a review of the troops each morning after breakfast, which was known as a "March On." Every morning about 7:30 we would all form up in front of our barracks and pass in review in front of Capt. Ates. We were also expected to sing, and wouldn't you know he had a particular affinity for "I've Got Sixpence" and all that other rot. The good Captain graded each flight and those that wound up with the best grade for the week got to leave the post first on the Saturday morning Open Posts. We only won it once, but we didn't suffer all that much. We caught GI trucks to Harrisburg, then rode the city bus to downtown Houston.

Houston was a big city even then, but the folks were as friendly as they could be. I went to the First Methodist Church about the fourth or fifth Sunday we were there, and darned if they weren't serving Sunday dinner to cadets, cooked in real houses by real people and they brought their real daughters down to help entertain us. That ended my journeys to Stuart's Beach in Galveston on Sundays, where we been going to soak up beer by the quart. These were real girls, just like the ones we had known at home, girls with mothers and fathers and homes and who didn't walk the streets or haunt the bars looking for a pick up. One of my classmates and I met two sisters. Mine had the

unlikely name of Novadean Duffel. We were really in luck. Their parents had us out to dinner, and we, in turn, took the girls to that place of places in Houston at that time, the Empire Room of the Rice Hotel, for dining and dancing. I was, for probably the fortieth time in my life, in love again. But it came to nought like so many other of my romances. But the people of the First Methodist Church in Houston will always have my unbounded respect for giving us something like home to go to, at least on Sundays.

He had another little neat deal, too. Every afternoon, we did close-order drill for a solid hour, between four and five, wearing our gas masks. About all this proved was that a gas mask would hold a hell of a lot of sweat. We had to lift the chin of the mask from time to time to let the water out, or we would have drowned in our own juices. To go with the March On, there was also a Saturday morning review, with all the bombardiers and navigators out on the ramp. Ellington also served as a twin-engine advanced school, but those people didn't have to get out and go through the evolutions with us. They were beyond that.

School was school. We had instructors ranging from excellent to competent to mediocre and less. Most of them were former schoolteachers who had found that the pay in the Air Corps was far superior to anything they had ever been able to make on the outside. They weren't all that tough, not as tough, as I imagine, as they had been to their high school students in their other life. But I guess we learned something. My grades were sure as hell a lot better than they had been at OU. But that isn't saying all that much, either.

Code was fun for everyone except the two instructors. Large rolls of tape played endlessly at one end of the room, sending groups of five letters out at all times. Intermingled with the letters were the numbers that we had to know, up to ten, I think. The two tech sergeants in charge sat at their table and read magazines, since even the basic instruction was recorded. When you could recognize 12 words a minute audible code and six per minute on the Aldis light, you didn't have to go to code school any more, which gave you an hour extra every day to wander around and waste time. They gave you a little code pass in the event you got stopped while wandering around. I got out of code by the second week of pre-flight, and I never needed it again in my military career.

We had the inevitable TAC officers, more of those wonders who could get a commission by spending three months on the job. I looked it up the other day just out of curiosity and discovered that I was an Aviation Cadet or Aviation Student slightly more than 18 months. This may have been one reason why those of us who flew looked down on those wearing bars without any aeronautical rating. It seems that we put in a lot more time and effort getting to be officers than they did. And we had to know a hell of a lot more in the bargain. We also got shot at with more regularity than the groundpounders, who sent us off each morning and who read the riot act to us regularly as cadets. We had one real prize at Ellington. His name was Mancuso and he

was built suspiciously like an ape, with arms that hung down to his knees. The rest of his appearance was more or less Neanderthal, with a bullet head, low forehead, sloping shoulders. The whole works was more comical than human. With his long arms, Lt. Mancuso would come in on Saturday morning for his white glove inspection of our quarters. He would remove the warm air register and run those long arms with white glove down the duct. Woe betide those cadets who happened not to know about this ploy. They wound up walking tours instead of going on Open Post. We heard about it early and beat him at his own game.

Another way we made the TAC officers look bad was the way we did the floors. Every Friday night we had what was known as a GI party. We supposed to take that godawful yellow government soap, stiff brushes, and hot water, and scrub the floors. Some of us soon discovered that a half-can of Drano in a bucket of water made the floors snowy white, really impressive, it was. I imagine that it caused the floors to rot out at an early age, using a caustic on them that way, but since we were only going to be there for 12 weeks, what the hell? After doing the floors we wore two pairs of socks and no shoes at all. We didn't want the shoes to mark the floor and we wore the socks to keep the Drano from eating the skin off the soles of our feet. On Saturday morning we got up, made the beds (white collar, tight enough to bounce a quarter and no white showing except at the head). Any white showing beneath the bed would get you gigged so the blankets were pulled tight. We put on our clothes as soon as we heard them call attention downstairs and stepped into our shoes. When Mancuso and the CQ walked into the room, they left footprints, so he couldn't gig us for his own footprints.

In the second or third week at Ellington, I still hadn't figured out a way to dodge PT. We were out doing the obstacle course, and as I pushed off to go up the 45-degree slanting obstacle I stepped on a rock or a clod and my ankle went pop. I rolled off the track and looked down at ankle that was almost immediately the size of a cantaloupe. The PT instructor yelled at me to get up and go on around, but there was no way. Some wag on the course yelled, "Don't just lay there, do push ups!" They carted me over to the hospital, set the ankle and sent me back to the barracks for the rest of the day. That was my last day of PT and my last March On while I was at Ellington.

We had about a week and a half to go to complete our 12 week stay at Ellington when a natural disaster took charge of our lives. It was reported that a hurricane had every intention of hitting Ellington with winds in excess of 120 miles per hour. Now tornadoes I knew something about but being from far inland I had never had any experience with hurricanes. It looked to me as though something that just blew instead of destroying would be a lot of fun.

The colonel commanding Ellington had been told to fly all of the AT-17s up to Waco for the storm. It seems he decided he didn't need to do anything foolish like that, not with all the warm bodies he had on hand. So he told them to tie the airplanes down, including the two B-17s that landed to get out of the storm and get the cadets on the line

to hold the airplanes in place. Which is fine if you're the colonel sitting in the office and not the cadet holding the rope.

Sure enough the storm arrived. Four cadets, even the guys in advanced twin-engine school had to get into the act, sat in the airplane for weight while eight cadets, four to a rope, hung on outside. We were also advised to wear our gas masks and it didn't take long to figure out why. The rain was driven so hard that it was like being out in a gravel storm; the gas masks saved our skin and our eyes. I had never before seen so much rain. Technically we were supposed to trade off with the people in the cabin every hour, but for some reason the people in the airplane lost their watches or something. So there we stood, GI raincoats, gas masks, and all out in the weather. About six in the evening, I think we went on duty about one p.m., they hauled a bunch of GIs up from an infantry camp to the south of Houston and they took over for a while. We were told to get back to the barracks as best we could. We soon learned that only the unwary walked from behind a building without taking a quick peek first. The asphalt shingles were blowing around pretty badly and they really hurt when they hit you.

We travelled in groups of four, arms linked. There was more water around than you would believe, up to the door handles on the cars that were parked around the base. That portion of the cars not under water was having the paint scoured by the high winds and rain. And some of the airplanes failed to stay in place. One of the B-17s blew into a hangar and several of the AT-17s wandered about the base on their own initiative. The disaster caused a board of inquiry to be convened and the base commander lost his job.

The hurricane, coming as it did near the end of our stay at Ellington, effectively ended pre-flight. We were told not to go to Galveston on our last weekend since it was something of a wreck. So were our barracks, so we were moved into open-bay type barracks for our last week at Ellington. But the food was still good and there was plenty of tomato juice left for the Sunday morning hangovers. I don't know what became of Novadean Duffel; we corresponded for a while and then she told me she was going to marry someone and that was the last I ever heard of her. Another love gone sour.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

We arrived at Laredo late on a Saturday afternoon and were advised that class would start for us on Monday. We were assigned to our proper tarpaper shack, issued a mattress cover and a blanket and were told to get cleaned up. What they neglected to mention to us was that the class for enlisted men, scheduled for that same Monday, had been postponed a week and that all those poor souls waiting for a shot at a pair of wings and more stripes had been placed on more or less permanent KP.

We discovered this oversight at our first meal. The disgruntled (and rightly so) enlisted men didn't so much serve our food as throw it at us. One never knew where his fruit salad and ice cream might end up. I always preferred my fruit salad in my mashed potatoes but many times in Laredo it wound up in either the meat or vegetable. And if anything on the tray happened to be hot, that's where the ice cream found a home. Laredo's chief claim to fame was that its PT officer was the famous Hank Greenberg, former and future first baseman for the Detroit Tigers. It was otherwise pretty dry, dusty, and featureless. We all visited Nuevo Laredo, since the beer was cheap.

The first four weeks found us back in ground school. Six of us were assigned to a long-suffering sergeant who was supposed to introduce us to all of the important subjects: the machine gun, the turret, the skeet range, the various firing ranges (once we understood which end of the gun did the damage), and generally to babysit us through this phase of our training. I have to give the government credit. Some of the activities may not have increased our skills, but they were certainly fun. One we all favored was the air-powered BB gun. One student held the gun, which had a seemingly endless supply of ammunition, while photos of various German and Japanese airplanes were flashed on a screen, all coming for the attack. You fired the BBs and fortunately no score was being kept.

In this classroom we were introduced to both the caliber .30 air-cooled machine gun (which we never saw again after we left the school) and the air-cooled caliber .50 machine gun, which most of us saw many more times in our careers. We learned to detail strip the guns; only on the .50 were we required to disassemble the gun and then put it back together again while blindfolded. As we stripped the gun to its bare minimums all of us were guilty of the same trick. We would lay out everything, bullet holding pawls, oil buffer group, bolt operating handle, et cetera. By working your nose you could rearrange the blindfold just enough to get a peek, making reassembly just a trifle easier. We also learned about the manned machine gun turrets with which bombers were equipped in those days. I never operated a turret again.

One of the more interesting activities was the "moving base skeet" course. Cadets armed with any one of a variety of repeating shotguns rode around in the back of a half-ton Dodge pickup, and took shots at clay pigeons as they were thrown from trap houses

hidden in the brush on either side of a rutted dirt road. One of the things that made it fun was that you invariably hit a pothole just as you pulled the trigger, so that the kick might catch you anywhere from the jaw to the ribs. You could tell from the bruises who had been on the moving base range. When not riding in the truck, you took your turn in one of the trap houses. Then you armed yourself with a stout stick and kept a wary eye for rattlesnakes, since they liked the shady houses in the middle of the day.

We also visited the malfunction, or troubleshooting (pardon the pun), range. There the guns either failed to operate or fired improperly. Our job was to figure out what the problem was. On our first day, one of the guns had been prepared a little too well – the sear on a .50 caliber machine gun had been filed a little too much, and when the gun was charged the bolt slipped forward, chambering the round and firing it. The sear wouldn't hold the bolt and it kept firing, blowing the gun apart and scattering frightened aviation cadets hither and yon. It took the range sergeant the better part of an hour to gather us back up.

To teach us to track a moving target, a jeep had been mounted on rails with a target on its back. The track ran around a circle behind a thick embankment. We discovered one spot where, with a little luck, a well-placed shot would disable it. Everyone tried but only a few were able to do it. If the jeep was disabled (which a .50 caliber round would do pretty easily) it had to be replaced, which took most of the rest of the day.

We were finally allowed to go to the flight line, where we were to put all this into practice, firing at a target sleeve towed behind another airplane. We were reminded to shoot at the sleeve, not at the other airplane. The first week we were to fly in the back seat of a North American AT-6, horsing a .30-caliber machine around by hand. The second week we spent firing from a turret mounted on the spine of a Lockheed Lodestar. Our spirits were at a peak. I have to mention a minor episode. The "Cadet Colonel" from our pre-flight class at Ellington, who was the picture of military perfection from his beautifully shined shoes to his absolutely straight gig line (and a former corps member at Virginia Military Institute, I believe), and was prone to lecture us lesser beings on the military virtues, went with us to Laredo. He was immediately appointed cadet colonel again, until he was actually faced with having the fly in an AT-6. They could not drag him into the airplane, he screamed, he moaned, he cried, and they finally gave up. He promptly disappeared from our lives, probably to the OCS at Miami Beach.

One of the more interesting sights on the flight line was a second lieutenant who was a Miami Beach grad, then won his wings as an aerial gunner. The man was so proud of his butter bars that he had sewn epaulets on his fatigues the better to display them. The high point of his military career had been a trip in a B-24 from Laredo to Rome, New York, during the course of which he had bombed the Mississippi with empty Coke bottles. The tale was more than twice told. Since we flew five days a week for 10 days, we heard the story at least ten times.

When the cadet arrived at the airplane with 200 rounds of .30-caliber ammunition, with bullets painted in his color of the day, in two canisters, a seat pack parachute, helmet and goggles, the mission was ready to start. The bullets, when passing through the target sleeve, would leave a color-coded hole. Counting these holes resulted in the student's score for the day. Seated facing the rear in the AT-6, the student first tied himself to the airplane with a devilish device called a "gunner's belt." This was a web belt affixed firmly to the floor, hopefully. The belt was run through the leg straps of the parachute and then, theoretically, adjusted to fit the height of the gunner. This only worked in theory, since the belts always seemed to be a bit long or a bit short. When the pilot lined up slightly to the rear of the towed target (remember: shoot the target, not the airplane) the first order of business was to get the ring-mounted gun pointed at the sleeve. Many an unwary cadet wound up with bruises on his arms and face by approaching this in too casual a manner. Invariably the first try ended in disaster. The gun could not just be swung out, but had to be slid out, butt first, or else the slipstream slammed the gun back into the hapless gunner. After he used up his first canister of ammunition, the gunner advised the pilot. In his joy at this announcement, the pilot rolled the airplane on its back and so under the tow ship. This caused the student, trying to change canisters, to grab it in panic, since it was following the law of gravity and trying to fall out of what had been the top of the airplane. Then, as the pilot flattened out, the canister suddenly weighed 200 pounds and the cadet found himself on his knees as the pilot climbed back up for the second pass. Between battling the slipstream and the aerobatics the student gunner was apt to spend more time trying to survive than trying to figure out his rad lead.

The pilots were really a breed apart. They nearly all had the letter "S" emblazoned on their wings, which meant they were civilian contractors and most were former barnstormers and mail pilots. They spoke lovingly of the OX-5 engine and Jenny. And they could fly anything with wings attached. We soon found that the sooner we fired off the 200 rounds allotted for each flight the closer they would fly to the target. If you dawdled, by the time you were finished you were lucky to be able to see the target. We learned that they could also fit an AT-6 neatly under the International Bridge with inches to spare on either wingtip, a practice that failed to delight the residents of either of the border cities. They were also much given to chasing deer, and, if possible, King Ranch cattle, a habit disfavored by the ranchers, who said it ran fat off the cattle and made it hard to herd them in the conventional way.

After a week fighting the slipstream and airsickness in the back of the AT-6, the Lockheeds were a snap, except that you spent half the time as the gunnery ship and half the time as the target. One could only hope that the people in the other airplane could distinguish a sleeve target from an airplane. It didn't help if you noticed how many patched holes there were in the Lockheeds.

Toward the end of the course, there was a skeet competition in which I broke 98 of 100 birds, an accomplishment of which I am still proud.

Gunnery school was an experience no fun-loving youth of the day should have been denied. For those of us who had no idea how dangerous it was, it was a blast. And besides, on completion we became wing-wearing members of the club, even though they were only air crew members' wings.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

We really went first-class from Laredo to Midland. For the first time in my military career we weren't in elderly chair cars, but genuine Pullmans for the two-day, one night trip from Laredo to our last stop in the Training Command, Midland Army Air Field, Midland, Texas. Or as the sign proclaimed in front of the Cadet Orderly Room, "Home of the Hell from Heaven Men." Dramatic, to say the very least.

Our arrival in Midland was hardly auspicious. The wind was howling, as only a West Texas wind can howl, the dirt was blowing, and the non-coms were making more noise than the wind. We were fallen in by the railroad siding (once again, no station, no platform, no nothing), complete with all of those damn barracks bags that were filled with sharp corners, and we were marched to our barracks. Once again, as we had been in pre-flight, we were placed not in open-bay barracks, but in four-man rooms. As usual, I was situated with the late H's and early J's, since everything had to be done by the alphabet.

We were once again marched to the theater as soon as we had put down our bags, and the major commanding, a World War I retreat, promptly informed us that this was a real military post and the go-to-hell Bancroft Flighters many of us had bought at Laredo were a thing of the past. So much for looking like we were real birdmen. We were also informed that since the aircrew wings we received at Laredo were part of our uniform, we were to wear them whenever we were in Class As. We were also told that things were going to be tough at Midland, where the washout rate approached 50 percent per class. Since we had already lost about 30 percent of the class in the previous schools, we assumed that those who survived would be the lucky ones. And the two things we had to do, said the major, was to have a small circular error on our bombing and make sure that our grades averaged better than 80 percent. I know I accomplished the first and I must have done well on the second because I was still there 12 weeks later, when the barracks were not nearly so crowded.

I always seem to remember the towns better than the bases, since the bases were essentially identical. The two towns nearest to the bomb aimer's school were Midland to the east and Odessa to the west. It was said that the oil folks made their money in Odessa and went to church in Midland. Odessa looked and smelled like an oil town, while Midland looked like a tidy little place where the two biggest buildings were the Scharbauer Hotel and the First Baptist Church. I frequented the former while off the base and the latter only once. My one visit found the preacher expounding on the then-popular honky-tonk song, "Pistol Packin' Mama." He was evidently opposed to it. After that, I left the religious matters to others.

Odessa had night spots of a sort, liquor stores, and all manner of evil things, so we naturally gravitated to Odessa on Saturday nights. About the only real shortage in either town was girls. I don't recall so much as even speaking to a girl, except the wife

of one of my classmates, the entire time I was there. There may have been some, but I was not privy to their whereabouts. So we drank a lot and my good friend Al Houghton and I spent most of our evenings, stag, at a place called the Ace of Clubs, where they had an alto sax man second only to Johnny Hodges. And both of us, even though Al was a Harvard man, were hooked on good jazz – good music of any description, for that matter.

As the major promised, bombardier's school was really tough. A portion of each day was spent in classroom work, not the nebulous math and physics to which we were accustomed, but this time practical application of theory. We spent time learning the hand-held plastic computers of the bombing trade, as then practiced. We learned to decipher the gibberish in the bombing tables, two huge notebooks covering nearly every bombing contingency, from the weight of the bomb through the free air temperature, target pressure altitude charts, the whole thing. And we used those computers, including the E6B, until we could handle them by rote.

We were introduced to the Norden bombsight, and each and every one of its parts. We had to know the function of each cog, gear, motor, pot, the whole works. We had to learn the nomenclature, the use, the purpose, everything about the sight. We were helped considerably in this endeavor by a forgotten warrant officer. This mechanical genius had built a wooden, color-keyed mockup of the sight, about three times actual size. It could be plugged in and even the most dense among us could see the operation of every element of the machine, from the rate drive and trail to the directional gyro. Mixed in with this system of instruction were hours spent on the bomb trainer, a long-legged platform with a sight, a PDI (Pilot Direction Indicator) and a steering wheel, so the student "pilot" could follow the instructions of the bombardier. The target was known as a "bug," paper was affixed to the top of the bug, and whenever a bomb hit the target bug, a stylus made a mark on the paper indicating the direction and distance from the center of the target. The pilot of the trainer (places were swapped every ten bomb runs) had to keep the needle centered on the PDI. It was wise to do so, since your partner would have the chance to get even with you very shortly. The first week an instructor rode the trainer with you. From that point you were on your own.

We were issued bombsight passes, since the hangar where the trainers were located had been more or less sealed. At each entrance were MPs with Thompson submachine guns which, although the Germans probably already had dozens of our sights, were there to make sure the atrocity-committing Huns didn't get a chance at them. There were sights all over the place, and every sight seemed to have its own armed guard on it. As a matter of fact, once we started flying, the two cadets carried the sighthead to the airplane between them, with drawn and cocked .45s in their other hands.

For the first four weeks, all we got to do was look at airplanes, not fly in them. We were being steeped in the lore of bombs, racks, fuses, you name it. More and more class work and more and more time in the bomb trainer. The days were about 11 hours in

length and when we started flying they sometimes lasted from 0430 until 0100 the next morning, depending on whether we had night missions or a night dead reckoning navigation mission to fly. Oh yes. Another part of the ground school was dead reckoning navigation, which I thoroughly enjoyed and would still enjoy were I to have a chance to brush up on it.

You may well ask about my experience with PT at Midland. It was nil, because they called roll by number and for some blessed reason they didn't have one for me. Not being a complete fool, I never mentioned this oversight to anyone like Lt. Hogan, our beloved TAC officer, another of the military wonders graduated from the Air Corps OCS at Miami Beach. At least the major had a set of wings, which indicated he had not always been in administration. The food at Midland was almost as good as it had been at Ellington, but then the finest hotels in the country would have been hard-pressed to be as good as the food was there. But there was plenty of it, the mess halls were open 24 hours a day for those who happened to be out flying around in the dark of the night. The post as a whole was a nice place, as long as one had to be on a military post.

After four weeks on the ground, we were issued leather A-2 jackets and a high-pressure oxygen mask. The Beech AT-11s we flew in contained the pilot, two cadets, an instructor, 10 100-pound practice bombs, and a whole raft of forms that probably took the airplane close to its maximum gross weight. While one cadet dropped his five bombs and filled out his share of the forms, the other cadet recorded his success (or lack thereof) with a 35mm movie camera. The film was used to score the cadets with some degree of accuracy and honesty. Missing pictures, either deliberately to help one's bombing partner or by accident, resulted in gigs and enough gigs resulted in tours – marching in a military manner for an hour (or several hours) with a Springfield rifle around a well-worn path. Gigs, incidentally, could be handed out during an inspection, while marching, for almost any infraction, real or imaginary. Tours weren't any fun at all.

Our first essay into the air was far more successful than I might have hoped. You set up the bombsight after considering all the factors that made for an accurate drop, made sure the rate motor was turning up to the proper RPM, then when the pilot settled on his course, synchronized the sight and let go one bomb at a time. The most unforgivable sin, and one committed by all of us at least once, was to tell the pilot it was OK to turn before we had caged the vertical gyro. Then the gyro tumbled and it was pure hell to get it upright again. I had a clipboard broken over my head when I let the thing tumble. Luckily I got it upright again in no time at all.

The cameraman crouched in the back of the AT-11 over a camera hatch that was secured to the floor by that most devilish of all inventions, the Dzus fastener. No one could ever have sold that thing to anyone but the government. They resisted every effort to refasten them.

With the bomb bays and camera hatch open, there was a considerable draft over the cameraman. On cold nights one was almost numb by the time he could close the hatch again. You could keep your feet more or less warm by removing the heater register and sticking them into the vent, but that was all that stayed warm.

All the tours I walked as a cadet were the result of being a cameraman.. One of the guys I bombed with was right on the ragged edge of washing out. He had a Circular Error of about 240 feet, just 10 feet from the limit. He offered me money and a promise that he would walk the tours if I would rope a few bombs for him. Roping was the term applied when the range from the center of the target was considerably more than the fact recorded. I agreed like an idiot. At night, you missed pictures by moving the camera back and forth, streaking the lights. In daytime, you moved it up and down, blurring the bomb burst. Needless to say he graduated and I never saw the money and was walking tours in the snow the night of our graduation dance. Since no sweet young thing had come to see my big day, it really didn't matter all that much.

We flew something like 120 hours during advanced, which may not seem like a whole lot in a period of eight weeks, but all during the time we were flying we were still busily engaged in classwork during the daylight hours, along with some flying, and we flew numerous night missions as well, always trying to miss the target just enough to hit the little shack that housed the lighting switches. So far as I know, no one ever managed to put out the lights.

One of the people in my class decided one morning when headed for the range that he would like to see if he could synchronize on a moving target. I think the main east-west highway at the time was US 82, but I could be wrong. He picked out a milk truck driving down the highway, and since one leg of that particular range was the highway, the poor fellow forgot to turn off his rack switches. He lined up and sure enough when the rate indices passed each other, off went a bomb. It landed about 50 feet in front of the truck. It was said that the driver stuck his foot in the truck and was last seen taking evasive action down the highway.

Several times during our advanced training we dropped real bombs, once it was 100 pound general purpose and once, as I recall, we had some 250-pound GPs on board. It was the 250-pounders that resulted in a near-court martial for one of our number. He had an accidental release while flying over a large herd of sheep. A lot of the sheep failed to survive the assault and harsh words were exchanged between the rancher and the military. I would imagine that the rancher doubled his money on the sheep lost in the accident.

Advanced was a relatively short 12 weeks. With about four weeks left to go in our training, all of the uniform salesmen started to show up in the Cadet Dayroom. Several clothing stores in both Midland and Odessa were hungry for the business. We received a \$250 uniform allowance at the time, which was a ton of money at the time. I chose The Model Shop from Odessa. They were nice people and they represented a really fine

tailoring firm, Kahn's of Indianapolis, the only company that guaranteed to cut your blouse and green trousers from the same bolt of material. I went so far overboard that I bought one pair of "pinks" that sold for 23 bucks. As a testament to Kahn's, the blouse is still in good shape after more than 40 years (make that 74 years). I overspent my uniform allowance by about 50 dollars and have never regretted it.

As an aside, we had a pretty lucky class go through Midland. All-told, we had only four cadets and two pilots killed during our stay there, which was something of a record. One plane went down when it shed a wing, and no one was quite sure what happened to the other.

Two weeks before graduation we were privileged to do something that was called the Ground Range. We were flown out into the middle of the West Texas desert, erected pup tents and proceeded to fly out of the pasture for four days. It wouldn't have been so bad had it not snowed while we were there. The supply trucks couldn't get through and the airplanes couldn't take off. All in all it was a most miserable few days. We got cold and we certainly got hungry as hell. And Leo Johnson, my tentmate and I, were both city boys with little or no interest in camping out. At least it reaffirmed my thinking: I was doubly glad I had had no interest in either the infantry or the field artillery (although my brother Dix ended up as an 8-inch howitzer gun commander in III Corps artillery).

The final few days were devoted to flying and filling out forms., We all had to be discharged from the AUS, at the Convenience of the Government for the Purpose of Accepting a Commission. Although technically we were out of the army for about 48 hours, no one left. The forms were filled out with meticulous and sometimes boring exactness under the direction of who else, a warrant officer.

Came the big day ... We put on all of our brass but the bars, complete with an eagle on the hat and were marched to the post theater. There we were treated to a speech from some buck general in the training command and marched across the stage to receive our commissions. Even Lt. Hogan seemed pleased that we were on our way.

There was a tradition at the time that when a new officer received his first salute, he laid a dollar on the enlisted man that popped the salute. The aisles were filled with the money hungry when the ceremony was completed. I felt that this was cheating so Leo Johnson and I passed all those and the crowd standing just outside the door. On our way back to the barracks a totally innocent PFC saluted us and was stunned when he got \$2 for his trouble.

We cleared the base by four in the afternoon and headed home for a two-week leave before reporting to our next duty station, in my case the Second Air Force replacement depot in Salt Lake City. I caught a ride home with a classmate, Fred Irwin, whose parents had left a car for him when they came down for the graduation. Fred was from Bartlesville, and he kindly offered to drop me off in Oklahoma City, which spared me two or three days on trains provided I could even get a seat. About seven that evening

we stopped in Wichita Falls for dinner. We stopped in front of a cafeteria downtown, locked the car and headed inside, and who to our wondering eyes should appear Staff Sgt. Swanson, the Minnesota Miscarriage, obviously drunk, unbuttoned and shabby, and he failed to render a salute. Naturally we stopped him, mentioned that not only had he failed to salute but that he was out of uniform, and that we were honor-bound to report him to the nearest MP; we took turns chewing him out while the other looked for a wandering military policeman. We made sure that he knew how we happened to know his name and that we had been under his care and tutelage more than a year earlier. It was an altogether delightful time. We kept him at attention for a good 10 minutes while we raked him over the coals for being such a sloppy soldier. It was one of the three times in my commissioned service that I ever ate anybody's ass out but this was the most rewarding. All Swanson could find to say was, "Aw, fellas, I was just doing my job." Seldom does one ever get a chance to even the score, but this was a case of doing the best with the time that we had.

## CHAPTER NINE

After spending a couple of weeks at home with the family and impressing all the girls I could find with a new uniform glittering with as-yet untarnished brass, I boarded the Santa Fe in Oklahoma City bound for Salt Lake City and further assignments in the Air Corps. Thanks to my father's friendship with the local Santa Fe passenger agent, I made the trip in a Pullman lower berth. Anyone who tried to travel in that period will recall they were lucky to have standing room, let alone a lower berth. Salt Lake was a revelation to a flatlander like me. Surrounded by the Wasatch Mountains, snow nearly every day of the four or five weeks I stayed there, and my single excursion into the world of snow skiing.

Salt Lake served as the replacement depot for the Second Air Force, which was charged with making recent graduates of the various service schools into more-or-less combat ready crews. The headquarters was at the fairgrounds in Salt Lake, where a bunch of temporary offices had been erected. Accommodations were primitive. We were housed in what had been the stock barns and I was assigned to one of the pig barns. No amount of cleaning could make it smell like anything else.

But there were places to be had in the town, so most of us headed there to seek out alternative housing. Four of us rented a two-bedroom and one-bath apartment (no sitting room or anything like that) in downtown Salt Lake City. I have forgotten the name of the place, but it was just a block off Temple Square and within easy range of any and all women of easy virtue, or so we thought. Still, it was far better than the barns. We only had one duty at Salt Lake. Every morning we reported to the fairgrounds to see if our names were posted anyplace for movement orders. Most of us read with horror the names of the people posted to Wendover, Utah, which consisted of an air base and a filling station. Wendover, among other things, was a B-24 phase training school and most of us, although no B-24 man will now admit it, hoped to get B-17s, which enjoyed a considerably better reputation for bringing home crews. If we weren't on the Wendover list, we all breathed a sigh of relief and read the rest of the names for other places. Wendover was also in the western Utah desert and prone to high winds and dust storms. Outside of the daily trip to check the orders and sign in, we were pretty much on our own, to find whatever trouble might be around and to get in on some of it.

Since I was there for more than a week, I naturally fell madly in love with a girl who was a student at the University of Utah. And, once again, the feeling was not reciprocated, so after a few dinner dates and dancing at the Jerry Jones Rainbow Rendezvous (on Fifth South between State and Main), this one came to its natural conclusion. I then fell in, with Johnny Connel, who was later to be our co-pilot, with some ladies of less savory characters who lived in the apartment house where I was a resident. They were the ones who borrowed a car and took us, one snowy day, up to

Alta, a nearby ski resort. After spending some time in the bar and looking at all the people sporting casts and walking on crutches who just couldn't wait to get back onto the slopes, the girls persuaded Connel and me to get some gear, put on some skis, and try the beginners slope. This slope, I think, was designed for not-too-bright or too-well-coordinated five-year-olds, but it cured me forever of the ski bug. After one trip down this gentle slope I decided that if I ever wanted to get down off a snowy mountain I would fall off rather than try to slide down on a couple of 1X4s. I have managed to avoid skis ever since.

About four weeks after I got there, familiar names appeared on the order board. I was assigned to crew 3494 (Barlow), and was to depart the next morning at 0500 for points to the east which were not designated. Most of us were happy to be leaving Salt Lake, since boredom was setting in. That, and the fact that there was a reception center at some fort outside Salt Lake and you spent most of your time returning salutes to people who still had some of the white tags attached to their uniforms.

Long before dawn the following morning we were all checked in, had had seven roll calls and were herded toward a train. I was not in the best of health that morning, having been out with an old cadet classmate, Al Houghton, until the wee hours. As a matter of fact, we had been out until time to head for the fairgrounds. Al had, of course, been drinking and I had merely been along to keep him from being a solitary drinker. There was no way I could have had a hangover, because everyone knows you have to be 21 to drink in Utah, and I was only 19. The train consisted of a bunch of Pullman cars and two or three troop sleepers. Naturally I drew a troop sleeper so that I could be uncomfortable as long as possible, and it turned out to be the longest rail trip known to man. The Denver and Rio Grande pulled out of the Salt Lake yards with the sun still nowhere in evidence and we started on our three-day, four-night trip to Dyersburg, Tennessee.

## CHAPTER TEN

Dyersburg Army Air Base was a Phase Training Facility of the Second Air Force, which was exclusively devoted to training combat crews for shipment to faraway places. The Second had really only one distinction: the ugliest shoulder patch ever known to man. It was square and ugly at the same time. What purported to be an eagle on the patch really looked more like a moronic chicken. None of us who were casual in that Air Force ever put the patch on our blouses. And we commiserated with people who had flown tours with any of the other Air Forces because they had to wear the thing.

The purpose of phase training was, the the Army put it, “to weld us into a fighting machine.” A phrase like that always really turned me on and got the old patriotic adrenaline flowing. What we were to do was become familiar with each other and the airplane we were to fly and get the hell overseas and start earning our pay.

The airfield was located some seven or eight miles from the small city of Dyersburg, Tennessee, and maybe 15 miles east of the Mississippi River. It lay next to the town of Halls, but since Halls was so little that even the post office had trouble finding it, the base was named after the larger of the two towns. As did so many of the wartime bases, the place consisted of a combination of two-story wooden buildings, a bunch of tarpaper shacks reminiscent of Laredo, and a group of 16-foot square plywood huts. It said in the brochure given to all new arrivals that they were supposed to be heated by coal stoves. It was one of these 30-gallon barrels that Connell and I were to use to make our escape from this particular military Siberia. The enlisted men were housed in similar circumstances, except they lived two crews to a hut, two of the huts being joined to accommodate the crowd.

I can only recall Connell and I being stuck in this shack, since our pilot, Harold Barlow, brought his extremely pregnant wife to town and secured lodgings with another young couple. Where our navigator, Bruce Stangohr, stayed, I have no idea, but since he wasn't long for the crew I don't imagine it made any difference. After a little better than a week in this hovel, Johnny and I decided that we were going to get warm in that place if it killed us. So we got a bunch of coal, a fuel that neither of us knew much about, and started feeding it to the heater. The barrel turned blue, then white, then collapsed. We removed all of our personal belongings and slowly wandered down to the Officer's Club to call the fire department. Since someone else had already seen the flames, the fire laddies got there without any help from us. After sifting the ashes for our bodies, they decided that we had survived. We were chewed out by the housing officer for burning one of his buildings that must have cost all of \$40 and were ensconced thenceforward in a real BOQ, a nice tarpaper affair that had a man who tended the fire.

The pilot had been through transition school in four-engine aircraft, the co-pilot had been sent direct to Salt Lake City from advanced. The bombardier and navigator had come from their advanced schools and knew nothing of the B-17 except that it was big and had twice and many engines as anything we had flown in up to that time. The gunners had come from their various tech schools, at least three of them. Bill Wayland had been to engineer school, Bob Breese to radio school and Frenchy Youngs to armorer school. They, along with the other three crew members, had been to gunnery school as I had. Stangohr missed that experience, but the navigator who replaced him, Rex Maluy, was a gunner too.

As I recall we had some ground school and brushing up on our various specialties, as well as some time on trainers. The navigators had this big dome, much like a planetarium, complete with all the stars they might reasonably be expected to use. The bombardiers had a target that ran along the floor and a sight to synchronize with. We also had ear phones that played a recording of the sound of four powerful Wright engines. Whether or not the navigators had this embellishment I have no idea. The recording did not include the sound of other crew members calling out the locations of enemy aircraft to distract us from our appointed mission. We were issued high altitude flight gear – sheepskin suits – and A-10 oxygen masks, the kind that pinched the bridge of your nose and rubbed it raw. We also received all the tools of our trades, in my case the Bombardier Kit, complete with all the slide rules and bombing tables as well as a bunch of pencils and sandpaper to sharpen them on (I never even had occasion to remove a pencil from its case), a tachometer so we could check the disc speed on the sight and a hack watch. We were, to all intents and purposes, ready to sally forth against the forces of evil.

On our first couple of flights as a crew we were accompanied by an instructor pilot, a man who must have had nerves of steel. He went along to supervise and I guess to make sure our neophyte pilots didn't bend the airplane. Crews were easy to get, but airplanes, even the worn-out B-17Es and Fs which were on the inventory at Dyersburg were harder to come by. The flights were long compared to those we were used to. In gunnery school it seemed you barely got off the ground before you were back again. A three-hour DR navigation flight was about the longest thing we ever did in the AT-11s at Midland. But here at Dyersburg five, six, even eight hour missions were the rule rather than the exception. I finally figured out what the idea was with all the flying and lost sleep: They ran you as hard as they could with each successive phase of your training, eating meals at two in the morning, getting four hours sleep, then back into the air again. It was all a plot by Training Command. They wore you down to the point that flying a couple of missions a week overseas made you think you were on vacation. The mess halls at Dyersburg were open 24 hours a day. You can't imagine how good the first meal in 12 or 13 hours can taste to a growing boy. Eggs were fried to order, all the

milk you could drink, then off to bed (or bunk) where you usually passed out the minute your head hit the pillow.

Barlow, for some reason, was convinced he knew more about the C-1 autopilot than I did. As a result he would never throw the last switch on the autopilot. Since this was the course (yaw) switch, it made it a little difficult to figure out why the airplane would not go in the direction I wanted it to when I tried to synchronize the sight on a target. I finally figured out what he was doing, so I would leave the sight, go up to the flight deck, put out the lights and throw the switch, all the while glowering at Barlow. He would have it turned off again before I managed to get through the tunnel to the nose. The head instructor pilot, who was a major, finally convinced Barlow that it was necessary for the autopilot to be completely engaged before the bombsight would work properly – and that was the whole point of the exercise. It galled him considerably, but my bombing score went up astronomically.

On one of these long training missions, a trip to Miami and on to Belen, on the northeast shoulder of Brazil, we were flying a B-17F with Studebaker-built engines. When we tried to leave Miami for Belen, one of the engines kept catching on fire. Barlow and Connell would shut it down, and the fire would go out. This went on for about half an hour, when Connell finally got sick of it and pulled the fire extinguisher instead of killing the engine. Which effectively killed the engine. The base engineering officer blew his stack, but we got two days in Miami while they changed the engine. The purpose of the mission was ostensibly to look for U-boats. We never saw one, not that we were looking very hard.

One airplane stood out in the collection of old green B-17Es and B-17Fs – one brand new, shiny B-17G, which was guarded jealously by the base authorities. Hardly anyone ever got to fly the thing unless they were very senior and could prove that never once in their careers had they ever damaged an airplane. With a number of airplanes down for repairs there came that fateful night when a crew in training had to fly the G model. The most experienced of the instructor pilots was assigned to the flight and it was to be strictly a local affair, never out of sight of the airfield. They were to practice three-engine takeoffs and landings with a lightly loaded plane. The precautions came to naught and the airplane ended up in the swampy waters of the Forked Deer River, which nearly surrounded the base. The pilot made a mistake while taking off on three engines and cut his fuel booster switches. All that could be seen of the precious G model the next morning was about eight feet of its tail sticking out of the water. The whole crew perished in the crash.

In another little incident, one crew, and I don't know where they were going or how they managed to do it, dropped two armed 250-pound GP bombs in the middle of the Mississippi near Cottonwood Point. They failed to detonate and barge traffic was stopped for two days while they dragged the river trying to snag the bombs. They finally gave up, and as far as I know those two aerial bombs still pose a hazard to

navigation. For practice bombing, there were ranges in east Tennessee near Smyrna. Targets were marked out in chalk, just like they use on the baseball fields. We first dropped 100-pound practice bombs on the range, then we camera bombed it, which was probably cheaper.

For gunnery practice we fired air-to-ground. It should have been obvious, even to a graduate of West Point, that all of our firing at twenty-plus thousand feet would be air-to-air. Therefore, no such facilities were available at phase training. The (ground) gunnery range was between Dyersburg and the river, in the swamps formed by the Forked Deer. There wasn't really anything to shoot at in the swamp but one house, still occupied by an elderly woman. The Army had tried to buy her shack for what was probably a king's ransom but she stubbornly refused to sell for any price. Her only access to the outside world was by rowboat, which was tied to a little dock near the front door. Part of the briefing for every gunnery mission included the instruction not to shoot at the house and absolutely never to shoot at the boat. Naturally the boat was the irresistible target for all those young men firing the weapons. I would hate to guess how many boats the government furnished that old lady, but I bet it was a bunch. About once a week notices were posted and lectures given about shooting up the boat and the severe penalties that would be imposed if we were caught in the act. So far as I know, no-one was ever caught. If we weren't firing over the swamp, they'd send us down to the Gulf of Mexico to try our hand. It really sharpened to old machine gun skills to shoot at water that stayed in the same place pretty much all of the time. The thrill of going to the Gulf came when you spotted a sailboat, then buzz it close enough for the prop wash to spill the air from the sails. We made a number of flights to St. Louis. I now remember why. Barlow had a friend who lived somewhere up there and it was safe to buzz that far from home. A lot of things were safe that far from home. We lost a trailing wire antenna over Louisville one night, the weight going through a house from ridge to basement. But we weren't from anyplace near Louisville, so some other base got the blame. We were a serious and civic-minded lot.

On one occasion we were assigned a formation flight with two other neophyte crews called a "thousand-mile round robin." On this mission we were supposed to camera-bomb the railroad yards in Little Rock, Ark., the railroad bridges across the Arkansas at Ft. Smith, the Lion Oil Refinery at Smackover, and the Standard Oil Refinery at Baton Rouge. The lead ship carried an instructor pilot. All the targets were supposed to be bombed from 10,000 feet, and each ship would bomb individually to keep the bombardiers awake. After the runs, the formation was supposed to join back up and get back to Dyersburg before the weather deteriorated completely.

For two of the B-17s, everything worked out pretty much as planned. As for our ship, DY-932, the mission devolved into a battle of wills between our more than ordinarily stubborn pilot and me, his devoted bombardier. Barlow still refused to clutch in the directional gyro on the autopilot. On this trip he finally got the message and after

a fiasco at Little Rock agreed to flip the switch at Ft. Smith. Turning toward Smackover after victimizing innocent Ft. Smith, we found that the weather had turned from simply bad to completely awful. Smackover was completely socked in, so the instructor decreed we would head for Baton Rouge, where we could see great bloody big thunderheads looming. Sure enough, thunderstorms surrounded the target and cirrus obscured the rapidly fading sun. With that, the instructor told everyone to head for Dyersburg independently.

Our navigator, Bruce Stangohr, bemoaned the fact that it was too late to get a sun line and with all those clouds things looked shaky for a three-star shot once the sun disappeared. This seemed an odd comment, since everybody on the crew, with the exception of the pilot and the navigator, knew that we were over Baton Rouge and once we got below the clouds we could find the Mississippi River, a not inconsiderable landmark. Then we could fly up the river to Dyersburg, a hot meal and a warm bed. Sure enough, once we let down there was the river, obvious even through the drenching rain. Even though radio reception was almost nonexistent due to the electrical storms, at least 80 percent of the crew felt sure that a couple of hours would bring us to Dyersburg and food. Such was not to be the case.

Up the river we went, past Vicksburg, past Greenville, there was Memphis on our right, the Naval Air Station, and up ahead in the gloom lay the lights of Dyersburg. To all intents and purposes, we were home free.

It didn't quite work out. We flew right past Dyersburg, despite comments from the copilot and me that there, just to our right, was home. The navigator and the pilot disagreed, saying that we hadn't been flying nearly long enough for that to be Dyersburg. On and on we flew, picking up and identifying the range station at Advance, Missouri, just before we entered the cone of silence. No problem, announced Barlow. A simple 180-degree turn and presto, we'd be at Dyersburg, out of this nasty weather and in our warm bunks. He missed the one-eighty, since the next range station we picked up was in east Tennessee, at Jacks Creek, to be exact. Again, Barlow announced that home was an easy turn to the west. As we flew over Dyersburg again, voices were again heard in the wilderness as certain members of the crew tried to convince both the pilot and the navigator that all we needed to do was make an approach and we would be home. Once again they were not only ignored but derided as well.

On we soared over Blytheville and on to Newport, Arkansas. Another one-eighty, over Dyersburg to Jacks Creek. Fuel began to be a concern, but we missed Dyersburg again, over Blytheville to Newport. Then the weather took a hand. For those who lovingly remember the sound of rain on a tin roof they have never been in a tin airplane when the hail began. With the lights of Blytheville in sight, the pilot called the tower, made one of the shortest approaches on record and landed on the last half of a short runway. In the course of landing I nearly trampled Stangohr to death, since he insisted

on leaving a tidy desk, and I had no interest in sitting in the nose when the airplane buried itself in the mud at the end of the runway. It didn't happen, but I didn't want to wait to find out.

We entered base operations and Barlow called the operations officer at Dyersburg. He was unsympathetic since our radio operator had notified them that we were landing. They had waited for some time, finally deciding that we had landed a little short and had joined the scrapyard in the Forked Deer River. The operations officer asked Barlow why an airplane as close as Blytheville couldn't get across the river to Dyersburg. He told Barlow to stay where he was for the night so that another airplane wouldn't get ruined, which would distress not only the engineering officer but the commanding general as well. He told Barlow to get up in the morning, go to the airplane and climb out directly over Blytheville until he reached an altitude of 8,000 feet. At that point, he should look to the east (adding somewhat unnecessarily that that was the direction the sun came up), look for the first paved runway in that direction, go there and land.

After a miserable and hungry night, we went out to the airplane on a totally clear and cold morning. With the cadets stationed at Blytheville eagerly seeking some crumb of our advanced aeronautical knowledge, we acted the part of conquering heroes, not dunderheads who had wandered all over the central United States the night before. We tore ourselves away from their admiring glances and commenced our 30 mile flight to Dyersburg. We were NOT greeted as conquering heroes when we arrived. The officers were told at base operations to get cleaned up and report forthwith in Class As. I think the term used was "in a helluva hurry." Barlow was the first victim of the inquisition. Having been a master sergeant in the Regular Army before learning to fly, he handled the whole thing like a prewar soldier: he blamed everyone else on the crew for the debacle. He said the co-pilot had failed to keep him informed, the navigator for not knowing where he was, me, who had the best seat in the house and who hadn't told Barlow his exact location. He even got one in on the poor radio operator for prematurely telling everyone we were home.

The rest of us got our share. Connell, our completely blameless co-pilot, got about an hour of it; I was threatened with probation unless I learned to help the navigator; and Stangohr, lucky soul that he was, was pulled from the crew and put back on the trainer, Army logic being that he should teach other navigators the tricks of the trade.

Between ground school and flying there wasn't too much time to goof off while at Dyersburg. I took advantage of one overnight pass to head for the river, catch the Cottonwood Point Ferry and visit my Aunt Nid and a cousin in Piggott, Arkansas. I was stranded there for a while due to a lack of gasoline ration stamps. A kindly neighbor of my aunt gave me some T (for tractor) stamps and I found a not-too-moral filling station attendant who honored them. I managed to get back to the base before I was declared AWOL. What little time off we did have was spent in Memphis, since

neither Halls nor Dyersburg were hoppin' nightspots. We had a car available, so Johnny Connell and I, along with the copilots from a couple of other crews, Johnny Johnson and Marty Gantmacher, spent as much time in Memphis as possible. I had my usual luck with the ladies in Memphis, which was nil; Johnny Connell met a coed from Southwestern University, and he must have made a big hit with her because he got regular packages of groceries from her when we went overseas. I think it was Gantmacher who had a tried-and-true method of finding out if he was going to score. If he and a date were passing a drugstore, he would say, "Wait here a minute, honey. I need to buy some rubbers." If she was still there when he came out, he knew he had a sure thing. I never had the guts to try anything like that. On one occasion, Johnny Connell and I were walking down a street in Memphis. Johnny was wearing a short officer's overcoat which he thought was pretty snappy. A man lounging in front of a store called out, "Hey, sharpie, what happened to the rest of your overcoat?" Johnny never wore it again. Although we stayed at the Claridge while in Memphis, we spent much time in the town's best hotel, the Peabody. I recall that the Peabody had a pond in the middle of the lobby peopled by some pretty territorial ducks. It was an unwary airman who ventured too close to the pond while in his cups, especially those who were so far gone that they fell in.

Our pilot's landlords introduced me to a lovely young lady in Jackson, Tennessee, where the wife had been reared. I cannot at this time remember her name, but she worked as a secretary for the contract primary flight school located there. I made the trip a couple of times, and we went to dinner and the movies. She later became a stewardess for American Airlines, and the last I heard from her was the wedding announcement.

Our 12 weeks at Dyersburg ended rather abruptly along about the middle of the ninth week. Warm bodies were needed in combat groups and although we were still not trained to the high standards set by the 2nd Air Force, off we went, once again by train, to our Port of Embarkation for the ETO, the most unlikely location in the world: Kearney Army Air Field, Nebraska. The only water nearby was the shallow, sandy Platte River. But if the Army wanted to call it a port, that was fine by us.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Once again we took to the rails, only this time someone fouled up completely and the train was nothing but real Pullman cars, so that we could all get a little sleep. There was to be a considerable layover in Kansas City, we were told, but no one was to leave the train lest they be declared AWOL and put before a firing squad. This, we were assured, would be desertion in the face of the enemy. Since we were unaware that Kansas City was peopled by Nazis we were a bit taken aback. Guards were posted at every exit from the train, but they weren't really needed. Try to tell a barely 20-year-old second lieutenant that he isn't immortal, and all it will get you is a laugh.

Kearney Army Air Field, located in south-central Nebraska, was as unprepossessing as most wartime military installations. Permanent posts like Fort Sill or Randolph Field, with real brick buildings and trees, they looked impressive. Kearney was as temporary as it looked. Its only advantage was that its runways were lined with brand-new, shiny B-17Gs, all ready to go out and join the war. We drew a Vega-built model (a division of Douglas Aircraft) with a regrettable tendency to catch fire in various places. These conflagrations were easily controllable, but occurring in an airplane filled with gasoline, they did give one pause.

Those of us who were married were followed by the wives who had transportation. There was the usual hole in the fence so that husbands and wives could share this last fling at connubial bliss. On reflection, it was a little pathetic; people clinging to those last few hours or minutes like there would never be a tomorrow. It was no problem for me; no matter how many times I fell in love, it was never returned.

The most unpleasant feature of Kearney were the two tables at the door of the officer's mess hall. They were manned by very persuasive ladies and backed up by a forbidding looking light colonel. One was asked to make a donation to the Air Corps Relief Fund at one table, and the Red Cross at the other. And they expected you to chip in every time you ate a meal. I am sure that someone, somewhere, at some time, got some benefit from the Aid Society, although I never met anyone who did. It was generally thought of as something old regulars might derive some benefit from, or at least gave them something from which to steal. As for the Red Cross, which undoubtedly helped someone someplace, our experience with it in the military always seemed to have a price tag attached, whether it was doughnuts on a wintry English day or by charging us quarters and rations when we went to the Flak House. Connell and I soon found that we could escape the mess hall by way of a window and not part with any of our hard-earned cash. One plea per day, maybe, but three times a day was way too much.

I can't recall whether we flew our assigned B-17 while at Kearney, but surely we must have. The airplanes were ferried in, low or no-time aircraft that were bound to have some bugs. I do remember a heated discussion between Barlow and the line chief

relative to minor glitches like the recurrent fires, but I doubt if there was any resolution. Line chiefs are notorious for their ability to ignore transient crews, unless they need gasoline. Then the line boys work, not the boss.

We took off early one morning, I think now, it may have been at sunset, (you'd think I would remember a significant event like that clearly, but I don't) with all our worldly goods stuck here and there about the airplane. We had bomb bay tanks, with the notation that they were mounted on racks that could be salvoed. This kept us from putting our B-4 bags and the like in the bomb bay. During the flight to Grenier Field, New Hampshire, several (I think three) of our shipment caught fire and crashed, with loss of life to only one crew, which had the bad luck to catch fire over the Great Lakes. It must have been a daylight flight because we landed in New Hampshire just before sunset. There was just enough light left to see what a beautiful place New Hampshire must be. It has been an ambition since those long-gone days to be able to see it from the ground, but it is a long way from Oklahoma. We got the usual casual crew meal, whatever was left over from the regular mess halls. It was not too impressive.

The next morning we were up and at it again, after being briefed and pointed in the right direction. From time to time we would check in with an Army Airways Station, using our code name (we were still trying to fool the Germans) of "Jammy George 61," easily the worst code name ever given to a combat airplane. We landed on snow late in the afternoon at Gander, Newfoundland. Having basked all day in the warmth of the plastic nose, I was ill-prepared for the temperature at that latitude. I jumped out of the nose hatch wearing only a fur-lined jacket and uniform pants. I jumped right back up into the nose to get a lot more clothes. It gets cold up there near the North Pole. All of the barracks and BOQs were distinguished by one thing – the steam lines ran, not underground as proper steam lines should, but from second story to second story. From this I deduced they get a lot of snow in that country.

We were stalled at Gander for three or four days waiting for the weather. We were fed, more or less, on whatever the local fishermen could catch and things that had been dehydrated sometime during the Civil War, found in a warehouse, and sent on to Newfoundland. Mealtimes were not looked forward to. Some of the sea creatures served to us would be unrecognizable to a marine biologist. Gander was not only lacking the comforts to be found in most mess halls but in every other way as well. About the only thing to do was wander down to a lake fed by a hot spring and check out a canoe from Special Services. They had a Piper Cub on floats safely hangared on the pond, but it was off-limits to those of us just passing through. The canoeing wasn't bad but the warm water had become the breeding ground for every mosquito in the Northern Hemisphere. They were apparently glad to have new blood because they swarmed all over us visiting canoeists. They got in your mouth, your nose, your ears. This took some of the pleasure out of a brisk paddle around the lake.

Came the great day and we were to be off late one afternoon. Properly briefed about everything but the location of a mid-Atlantic convoy that seemed to have been misplaced, we trudged to Jammy George 61 and set out to emulate Lindbergh, only with more and better equipment. Our destination was to be Nutts Corners, Northern Ireland, which was 11 hours more or less from Gander. Throughout the night we kept a wary eye out for the convoy in the event a nervous merchant ship decided to shoot at us. I had the Aldis light at the ready with the proper recognition signal written out on a piece of paper and taped to the bombsight lest I forget how to get them to stop shooting.

A tribute to Rex Maluy's prowess with his sextant (he had replaced the unmourned Stangohr as our navigator) and all of his various tables was the fact that we split the runway at Nutts Corners. He hit his ETA right on the button and we were once again safely on the land. Prior to leaving the States we had all stocked up on things like Snickers bars and cigarettes, having been told these things were strictly rationed in the UK. On disembarking we left the top secret Norden bombsight on the grass beside the runway and took our personal belongings to a hangar watched over by an armed guard. In the belongings were the cigarettes and the candy, naturally. We were assured everything would be safe. After all, there was a guard with a carbine wearing an MP brassard ready to defend our property. How could anything go amiss? They went amiss all right. When we returned for our personal belongings and goodies every bit of our luggage had been gone through and everything that could be used for trade goods, like candy and tobacco, were nowhere to be found. So much for the security of a warehouse with an armed guard. It was also our first experience with the general disregard for the sanctity of personal property in the ETO. We learned not to let anything of value out of our sight for the duration of our tour; we even learned some of the finer points of "borrowing" ourselves, especially when it came to some new piece of equipment or anything concerning our safety and comfort.

We were at Nutts Corners only long enough to be looted and loaded on a C-47 for a trip across the Irish Sea to our next duty station, the Combat Crew Training Center at Bovingdon. The nearest railroad station bore the quaint name of Hemel, Hempstead and Boxmoor, or, as the trainmen called out, "'Emel, 'Empstead, and Boxmoooooooor!"

At the CCTS we were introduced to the marvels of the G-Box, World War II's electronic long-range navigation device. It worked for a little less than six degrees of longitude, or less if the Germans were jamming it. Which they almost always did. We were treated to lectures about Escape and Evasion by RAF types who spent most of their time being Terribly British. One pair had escaped from a prison camp with a six-foot rule and a notepad. While at the training center, we were permitted a pass while waiting for orders to a combat group. Connell and I both set out for London on the train. We were both inveterate tourists. He hailed from an even smaller place than Oklahoma City and both of us were enamored of new sights and sounds. Once in London we had our first ride on a subway, or as Londoners called it, the Tube

(pronounced "Choob"). We viewed with awe the destruction that had been wrought during the Blitz, with literally hundreds of acres of what had once been part of the city consisting of nothing more than thousands of piles of cleaned bricks. And the glass dome of one of the railroad stations (Victoria? Liverpool?) was now nothing but a wrought-iron framework.

Arriving in Piccadilly we started to try and see the sights, although we had little notion of where said sights might be. We were accosted by a short, dumpy little man with miniature medals on his lapel, an affectation sported by many Englishmen in those days, especially doormen. He offered, for a modest sum, to show us some of the sights. Being hicks of the first water we assumed he was selling some sort of a bus tour of central London. Instead, whenever we got on a bus we paid our fare and his fare, and then walked endless miles with him. But we had to protect our investment. It was a tiring experience and eventually a boring one. No matter where we were, Hyde Park, the pit where the bulls and the bears once fought, standing in front of St. James Palace, he had a pat comment: "Sort of reminds one of Inja, doesn't it?" And no matter how many times we told him that we had absolutely no knowledge of Inja, he kept on asking the question. He had probably never been to Inja either, but I suppose he thought it was a nice touch.

We returned to Bovington and the real world. We were loaded on a train as a crew, given travel vouchers and we were at long last off to war, each with our own little package of C rations. Mine was the ubiquitous Meat and Beans, along with some lemon-flavored battery acid euphemistically called "lemonade" and two Raleigh cigarettes.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

As the London and Northeastern train squealed to a stop at Eccles Road, we had our first view of the home of the 96th Bombardment Group (Heavy). It was not what one would call inspiring. Scattered around on one side of the tracks was an assortment of rusty Nissen huts and on the other hangars and hardstands and B-17s, some wearing faded OD paint, others glistening in the rain in their natural aluminum color. But I don't recall seeing a lot of mud, as had been widely advertised. We were met at the station by a truck that hauled us to the 337th Bomb Squadron area. We were ushered into the orderly room by a long-suffering staff sergeant, our charge of quarters, a diminutive man named Feske. It was Feske's lot in life to put up with all the combat crews, be the butt of their questionable practical jokes and be greeted with howls and groans when he came to wake us up in the middle of the night to go and play soldier. We waited for a few minutes, and then Feske took us in to meet our new commanding officer, Major Ted Diltz.

He was a Texan who greeted us with the requisite Army scowl and warned us about what would happen if we fouled up but left out other things that might happen whether we fouled up or not. Diltz was an old-timer in the 96th, who had known Archie Olds from the group's time in Idaho. He indicated that Olds, when displeased, could be one mean SOB and if we happened to bring the wrath of the colonel down on the head of the major, we were in real trouble.

He called Feske, told him to issue Barlow a bicycle, and to show us where to bed down. It was hut 42 if my memory serves me and it was no more attractive than the balance of the huts in the squadron area. Permanent party, like the ground executive officer, armament or ordnance officer and other staff types had been in England long enough to have acquired some creature comforts. They lived in huts, but they were of the four-bedroom, one common room variety, so that they could, when weary of their duties, have some privacy. Our quarters were considerably more humble. Three crews, 12 officers per hut. Over and under bunks, things that served as closets, a chest of drawers for every two officers and plenty of mice. For a mattress we were issued what the Limeys called "biscuits," which were much like the cushions for porch gliders at home, with all the softness removed and four ridges so that you had welts when you woke up in the morning. No mattress cover, since none would have fit them anyway, two or three GI blankets and a comforter. We were now at home. Our hut had an added convenience. Someone had liberated a picnic table so that we had somewhere to sit and read and play casino.

It was heated, if that is the proper word, by a coke-burning space heater. It would generate enough heat to warm shaving water but little else. One had to stand on it to warm any part of one's body. And it would not, no matter what stratagems were

employed, remain burning overnight. So much for our creature comforts, which may explain why we spent so much ground time at the club.

With four officers and one bicycle Connell and I decided we were woefully underwheeled, so we struck a deal with a mechanic, who probably had a good racket going in hot bicycles, for one of our own. I think we popped about five English pounds each for half-ownership in this vehicle, and it turned out to be well worth it. With the bike you could make the occasional foray into Banham to visit The King's Head, ride it to the wash house, take it to the club, all sorts of things. Of course, it had to be locked up or it would disappear to be resold.

The squadron area was a not-too-hospitable place. There were latrines, for both officers and enlisted men, a post office of sorts tended by the man who also handled the dry-cleaning of uniforms in 100-octane aviation gasoline (yes, we were an aromatic bunch), and a hut where an elderly enlisted man would sell you a haircut. He refused to guarantee the quality of his trims, which was judicious. You might come out peeled, unevenly shorn, you might come out spouting blood from clipper nicks. You put down your 10 shillings and you took your chances.

For dry cleaning the postman handled the job nicely by dunking your clothes into the av gas. He was even brave enough to press them with a hot iron, although sometimes it took a week to get the gasoline fumes out of your blouse. And there was no shortage of cleaning fluid for the operation. All he had to do was take a bucket out to the nearest hardstand and drain whatever he needed from the wing and he was in business.

Although some of the names and faces have slipped from my memory, there were some unforgettable people in the unit during my stay. First and foremost was the ground exec, a World War I retread named Deacon Jones. He was a major too, but was given to very little growling. From Virginia, Deacon was one of the finest gentlemen I have ever known. An example of his courtesy – the four of us were approaching the club after a particularly grueling mission. We had been up for probably 16 hours, we were tired, we were dirty, our faces were still creased from our oxygen masks. In short, we were ill-suited to observe military courtesy. Out of the club came Deacon. He saw us and popped a real West Point salute before we could even get our hands out of our pockets. He straightened us up, we returned the salute and felt once again like we belonged to the human race. I am sure that our ground exec, an old man in his late 40s at the time, has long since been laid away, but at least one second lieutenant has never forgotten that salute. Or the man.

Then there was the inimitable General Curtis LeMay, a wing commander at the time of my arrival and later commander of the 20th Air Force and much later the Strategic Air Command and finally Air Force CG. And suiting his personality he ran for vice president with George Wallace in 1968. Now that nearly everyone is dead or in a rest home, LeMay is credited with many things, including being a military genius and a

Great Leader. From my point of view he was neither. He was loud, he was abrasive, he was a career soldier who probably (I don't know this to be a fact) graduated from the Trade School on the Hudson. His idea of leadership was to yell, cuss, scream, threaten, and blow cigar smoke. One of his early innovations was to change our formation, from three groups (high, low and lead) to five groups abreast. I was along the afternoon we burned all that fuel and endangered all of those lives. The airplanes were all over the sky. Even the slightest turn had the inside group bordering on a stall and the outside group bending the throttles trying to get around the corner. So much for LeMay.

Then there was General Archie Old, the first commander of the 96th. I avoided the man like he had the plague, even when he appeared at a group reunion in the early 1960s. At that time he was wearing three stars and he was formidable enough with a silver oak leaf.

We had a light colonel, Stanley Hand, who was group operations officer after a long stint as commander of the 413th Bomb Squadron. Col. Hand looked like a soldier and acted like one. Always immaculately turned out, he was crisp, to the point and never left any doubt in anyone's mind that he meant what he said. My contacts with him were brief, usually when I had the bad luck to be duty officer and I had to wake him up.

Dilts hardly left any impression on me at all. After our original interview, we saw little of him, except at the club where he and the engineering officer seemed to operate a house crap game. I'm not certain about Dilts and the crap game, but Johnny Cole was on hand every payday to help us lose our money. Rumor had it that Dilts had been a football player at Texas A&M. I don't know if that was true, but he had the build for it.

Ordinarily, Sgt. Feske was our voice of doom, otherwise known as the charge of quarters. His job it was to call crews for missions. He would throw open the door to our hut, switch on the lights (after closing the door), and read off, "Lt. Shinault's crew, Lt. Skelton's crew, breakfast at 0200 (if in the spring and summer), briefing at 0300." He was invariably greeted with groans and shouts and threats against his life. So we would drag our asses out of bed and get dressed. Most of us had shaved the night before – you couldn't grow a beard and wear an oxygen mask. The hair would let too much of the oxygen leak out. The dressing ritual was standard and one of the odd superstitions by which we lived. We put our clothes on exactly the same way every morning. You might vary what you wore, but you never varied the order in which you dressed. And most of us had talismans that you would not change, not if you wanted to come back in one piece, despite the overwhelming evidence that none of these things mattered in the least. My talisman was an absolutely disgraceful GI towel that I wore as a scarf. It wasn't meant to keep my neck warm, as you might think, but to keep the inflation tubes on the Mae West life jacket from rubbing raw places on my neck. Everybody had something to keep those damn rubber tubes from permanently disfiguring them. And everybody had some good luck charm or ritual that they wouldn't change. Even practical people who would deny they were superstitious

would tell you their particular quirk was different. Ben Tarwater, who lived in the hut across from us, would never start an engine until he played something, and no one was ever sure what the tune was, on a harmonica he always carried.

Since it is usually wet in England, we kept our flying boots in the hut with us and trudged the two blocks from our squadron area to the mess hall, where the fare seldom varied. Reconstituted powdered eggs, reconstituted powdered milk (which always tasted exactly like milk of magnesia to me) corn flakes, coffee, and if you were lucky some water and sometimes some fruit juice. We then proceeded to the briefing room, which was more or less adjacent to the mess halls, for both officers and enlisted men, so one walked over to the room. Now we get back to the superstitions again. You sat with your OWN crew, no one else. There might be other people on the same bench, but you were with your own people, not a bunch of strangers. Clannishness in a combat crew became virtually a vice. You hung with your own, all of the time, when danger of any sort was even in the air.

The noise and tobacco smoke in the long Quonset hut was oppressive. The conversation was rough and the smoke thick enough to cut with a knife, with cigarettes, cigars, and pipes all alight. The mission board was to the left of the stage where the target map was located. Listed there were the crews, their positions in the formation, and the aircraft to which they were assigned. The room was called to attention when the colonel or group commander came into the room. He was followed by a bunch of people, intelligence, weather, doctors, chaplains, and the rest of the staff. The colonel or group commander would say a few words about how important the target was, like "This factory turns out 13 percent of all baby buggies used in Germany. We must wipe it out."

Then the curtains were drawn back and depending on where the yarn reached and how it got there, there was a chorus of groans or sighs of relief. If the thing went up over the North Sea, it was a cinch it would be what was called a "deep penetration." But sometimes they fooled you and ran a DP right through Belgium or France. The longer the war lasted the more likely they were to send you by a more or less direct route. On the big map were marked flak concentrations (moderate to heavy from the intelligence officer meant they had enough to make you nervous as hell) and "mildly deterrent," a euphemism much in vogue in the intelligence community, meant they might not have as many guns but they knew how to aim them. There was a standing joke at these briefings – the sergeant manning the slide projector, used to show photographs of the target, was always told to adjust the thing so we could see the pictures better. He always giggled and said, "Movin' pitchers!" It happened so often everybody in the room said it in unison. At this point everybody synchronized their "hack watches," so there wouldn't be any embarrassing lateness at key rendezvous.

The target would be named by the briefing officer, routes, winds and weather covered by the appropriate people, with the weather officer's predictions being roundly

hooted. Having a correct temperature at the target was essential to the bombardier, but that's why they put a thermometer on the airplane. Then, whichever officer was supposed to lead the raid would get up and rant and rave about keeping a good formation and all the other things scared field-grade officers are wont to rave about.

As this briefing broke up, and I never knew anybody who ever took a note during the things, the people went their separate ways. Bombardiers were briefed on the target and given maps and photos, and even more information on what the target pressure altitude might be, your pressure altitude, target temperature, free air temperature, the whole ball of wax.

Navigators were briefed and given mimeographed flight plans. They were advised exactly what "chains" we would be using on the G box, winds aloft, fuel, and any other information useful to their jobs. Pilots were given start and taxi times, radio information, which crystal would call whom and what airplane would monitor. Power settings were recommended, but since every airplane flew a little differently they didn't mean a whole lot.

Then everyone to the parachute shop, where you kept your oxygen mask, your electrically-heated suit, gloves, and other accouterments. After you drew your chute, you boarded a truck for the armament shop, if you were responsible for a gun (or any number of guns), draw the guns from the armory. In my case, I drew three .50-caliber machine guns, since I had a ball mount in the nose to supplement the two guns in the chin turret. The chin turret looked great, but it was so slow it was painful; it had a high-speed setting that would burn out the motor in short order, leaving you feeling completely undressed in front of the entire Luftwaffe. Even if you couldn't hit anybody, it improved my morale to be able to shoot at them like a real combat soldier. The navigator had the two cheek guns, which were practically useless. The only people who got off easy were the radio operator and the waist gunners, who had one each. Catching a weapons carrier to the hardstand (you gave the driver your aircraft number) you installed the guns, threw everything, including the flak suit you had picked up also at the chute room (up into the nose in my case) then helped Robbie pull the props through (yes, even us hot shot officers did that). To install the guns in the chin turret, the turret was cranked around to the right as far as it would go, and the barrels raised to maximum elevation. One unscrewed the back plates on the turret, one for each gun, then inserted the track group, the oil buffer group and then put in the bolt, inserting the spring that never wanted to fit in the base of the bolt, then affixing it firmly in the slot provided for the little stud on the side of the bolt spring. Fortunately there was usually a stepladder available to assist me in reaching the turret.

The pilots did their walk around preflight inspection with the ground crew chief, and I inspected the bomb load and I wished I could remove the cotter pins that safetied the arming wires before we took off, especially if the bombs were double-fused, which meant twice as many cotter pins. Bob Breese, our radio operator, checked the

frequencies he was to guard and if we were the camera ship, checked the huge Fairchild K-2 camera mounted in the hatch in the floor of the radio room. These tasks performed, there was usually a little time to goof off. If the weather was nice, you laid on the ground with your parachute pack for a pillow (even though we weren't supposed to lay them on the ground) and gave the ground crew a hard time. One quote might be in order here. Our ground crew chief, Robbie (and I can't remember his last name), told us after we had been flying his airplane for a month or so, "I swore I would never again get close to another crew. They either get killed or finish up and go home. But here I am, getting to where I like you guys, dammit!" We thought it was nice of him to say so. The man driving the fuel truck (or "bowser," as our British friends styled it) would come by and gas up the airplane. We watched him once, and the truck had two pump gauges, one for Imperial gallons, the other for U.S. The U.S. gauge would spin like crazy while the needle on the Imperial gauge would barely creep around the dial. I asked him which gauge he used, and he said, "Oh, I just put gas in 'em 'til they're full." So much for exact weight calculations.

Before takeoff, we would always, as a matter of luck, relieve ourselves on the elevator. This was known in the trade as Pissing on Robbie's Airplane, which always caused considerable comment from our crew chief, Robbie, about certain unsanitary bastards he had to associate with and other unpleasant remarks. It might be well to mention here that not one of us (at least if we had any sense, got into the airplane without checking which way the relief tube outlet was pointing. This stickler for personal and corporate hygiene had been known, on many occasions, to turn the outlet into the slip stream which caused considerable discomfort aloft if you had to use the thing. Freezing up was bad enough, but to have it all blow back on one was the worst possible. Then it would freeze on your Mae West, your harness, your flak suit, everywhere only to thaw on your way back home. Thus one always checked just before getting in the aircraft and kept an eye on both Robbie and his helper Chico until you had taxied off the hardstand. One could not be too careful around the troops. We also wore electrically heated suits, very much like the electric blankets in use today. Extended use would flex the wires until they broke, so you could be wearing a suit that kept one side warm while the other side froze, or you might get little shocks occasionally as the bare wire worked its way through the fabric.

Readiness being all, as the poet said, we waited for a double green flare from the airfield control tower to start engines. This will sound foolish and sentimental at this late date, but it never ceased to be a thrill for men when the engines were started. In the very pale light of dawn, or the pre-dawn dark, there was no prettier sight than the engines torching and the sound of their coughing and regurgitating, trying to start. Anyway, that was a beautiful sight and a beautiful sound to me, no matter how many times I saw and heard it. Once we were cranked up, the pilot would call the tower, in our case the code name was "Chairback." I'll never forget the formula, since I heard it so many times: "Hello, Chairback, hello, Chairback, this is Paintbrush M for Mike,

flying number two in the lead, lead Vampire Red.” The field next door was “Goldpin,” and of course there were a host of others I can’t recall at this late date. We would be given a taxi time, and at that point start down the perimeter track, always essing so we could keep the airplane ahead of us in sight and keeping a respectable distance behind them. Before daylight it was easy to see the tiny red light on the airplane in front. After the sun came up, even a little, it was not so easy.

After take-off and during climb-out the bomb aimer went back to the bomb bay (being a cautious sort he always wore his parachute, which resulted in certain comments regarding his personal courage) and taking his pliers in hand would remove the cotter keys that safetied the arming vanes. One did not, if he had any sense, throw these cotter keys away willy-nilly. He carefully hoarded them in the event the airplane had to abort so he could replace them in the vanes. There were two safeties – the keys and a wire that was attached to the shackle of the bomb. When the bombs were dropped the wire remained in the airplane and the vanes could then spin off and arm the bombs. Woe betide he who had bombs hang up in the bay after the safety wires pulled. He was then faced with a bunch of spinning vanes and bombs on the verge of being armed. When hauling delayed-action bombs and aborting or having the mission recalled the bombs were dropped in a designated area off the coast. These bombs were activated when they were loaded – acid was released which ate its way through a metal plate at a regular rate and when the acid got all the way through the bomb was activated and hopefully exploded doing great damage to the local populace.

We usually would break out of the crud that so frequently covered England at about eight or nine thousand feet. When we reached half the altitude we needed for join-up height, we would execute a 180-degree turn and head back to our “buncher” beacon, which for the 96th was Buncher 9. From far off we could see numbers one and two in the formation firing red/red flares. When we pulled up to them the pilot would call as follows: Hello, Vampire Red One, this is Vampire Red Three coming up on your left wing.”

The lead pilot would respond, “Red Three, this is Red One. Join up. We are firing red/reds every minute.”

Our pilot would say, “Roger, Red One, red/reds every minute starting now.”

That would pretty well end the radio conversation for the rest of the day, except for transmissions from other airplanes joining the formation and transmissions from Red One to the formation or to particular airplanes as the need arose.

In the tail of the lead aircraft sat that bomber’s copilot. With the command pilot in the right seat, the copilot became Formation Control Officer for the raid and would harry people back into formation and advise the Command Pilot of the state of the formation, report aircraft out of station and Fortresses that were obviously too far gone to make it back into formation, such as the ones that were burning, exploding, or spinning in.

After the formation was built, we would proceed (and by God on time, too) to the assembly area for our wing. If leading the wing, in our case the 45th Combat Bomb Wing, we would get there first. After the wing was formed, we would head for the assembly for the

Division, usually a few miles in from the coast. With the Division formed up, we would, at the appointed time, head for Coast Out.

The two departure points that I remember best were Beachy Head and Great Yarmouth. There were others but they don't ring a bell in my memory anymore. Over the water we would all check our guns to make sure they hadn't frozen coming through the clouds over England and the bombardier, as we climbed to bombing altitude over either the North Sea or the Channel, would begin his biggest job of the day, making oxygen checks about every ten to fifteen minutes throughout the mission. He would call each station not by person's name but by position and make sure no one was already suffering anoxia. We had a tail gunner by the name of Cleon Ayer who was somehow able to keep a cigarette lit at 20,000 feet, and sometimes he failed to answer his call. On one occasion he was unconscious due to anoxia, and we caught it just in time.

From coast in to target you kept your eyes open, no matter your natural inclinations to go to sleep. Fighters and such like lurked on the far side of the coast. Usually as we crossed into occupied territory we would pick up a little flak. Never much and never accurate and usually to one side or the other of the formation. But it helped to keep you awake. In the early days, prior to the drop tanks, we lost our fighter escort shortly after we had entered enemy territory and you might pick up a ton of fighters, you might pick up a few and you might not see any. About where France and Belgium join up we could usually be assured, if we were routed that way, to pick up ME 109s in some number and usually with considerable skill on their part. That was a bad way to get into Europe I preferred Holland or farther north. Since I was in the nose, I became pretty familiar with the head-on attacks made by German fighters. They'd come roaring in level with the formation, firing all the way. I would shoot back most frequently with the socket-mounted .50 in the nose, since the turret was practically useless. They would roll over on their backs and dive out of the formation, and I could tell I was hitting them because I could see the sparks from the .50-caliber slugs hitting the armor plate on the bellies of their airplanes. Nothing was more frustrating. When a German fighter exploded, it was a gray-green smear of smoke with parts of the airplane being spit out one end.

When we came into Germany proper from the North Sea we always woke up the people on Heligoland Island and they would usually come up to check us out and see if we were awake. On days when there was 10/10ths cover, it took longer to get any opposition up this way. There was always a hole over Dummer Lake and they would climb out over the lake, form up and then come after us. I liked 10/10ths days myself. The fewer fighters the better. As each fighter or group thereof was reported, we would look and try to find them. It was a bad time to have a spot or bug guts on your glass, since one had a tendency to shoot at the spot. After we got fighter cover all the way in and out things were much easier for all concerned. We would first call them as Bogies and then identify them as friends. Fighter pilot outfits would, for some unknown reason, come in screaming over the radio that they were

little friends and not bogies. They would also never, ever point the nose of one of their airplanes at the formation. That was a cinch way to draw some fire, sometimes accurate enough to give the pilot a severe case of the shakes. Contrary to what you see in Hollywood movies, you couldn't hear the flak exploding unless it was really close, and then it was like someone had kicked the side of the airplane with a huge boot. Shell fragments hitting the B-17 sounded like gravel being thrown into a metal trashcan. Anyway, we would proceed in what the British called a stream toward the target. On reaching the IP (Initial point) bomb bay doors would open and we were glued to a course no matter the opposition. Flak would usually start on the run, sometimes at the very beginning, sometimes half way down the run and would continue until the bombs were dropped and for a few minutes after the turn and before the rally point was reached. This flak, depending on the target, could be either barrage or predicted. One was as bad as the other since they had as good a chance to hit you by chance as they did on purpose. If you had any sort of a head wind it would get pretty hairy because your ground speed would be so low that they had a really good crack at getting the range. Usually the German fighters would lay off once the flak started.

At times they would put up what we would call a snooper. He would fly alongside just out of range and radio back our course, air speed and what have you so that the gunners could cut their fuses and get on with their business. I didn't like snoopers, since that seemed an unfair advantage.

After turning from the target (incidentally, we always dropped on the lead aircraft whose first bomb was a smoker so we could all see it.). And also, sometimes we bombed by group and sometimes by Wing. Don't ask me why. Back to after turning from the target we formed up again, filling the holes left by the airplanes that had left the formation for one reason or another. It was sometimes a little disheartening to look around and see that there were more airplanes flying home alone than there were in the formation.

Back we would go, picked up by the fighters as soon as we left the flak and pursued by them until such time as we got back to where our fighters could cover us, or after we got full time escort we didn't have that problem. Let the 51s and Jugs take care of the EA. We would begin our let down (we bombed at anyplace from 22,000 to 27,000) either over France or Belgium or Holland or over the North Sea and usually come back into England under the cloud cover which seemed a permanent fixture of the island. If it was too thick we would come in over the stuff, get over Buncher 9 and circle, airplanes leaving the formation one at a time. It was always the same sequence. If there was a diamond on the low, he peeled off to the left first, if no diamond, then six in the low would peel off, followed by 4, then 5, then 3 then 1 then 2 and so on. Low squadron would be followed by lead, then finally high.

If there were wounded aboard, those airplanes would ask for priority to land, which was always granted. They would make the approach firing red flares to indicate that they needed an ambulance to meet them. Once on the ground we were barely able to move, and believe me, most people were well worn out by the time we got back. Sucking on an oxygen hose and being both cold and scared for anywhere up to ten hours wears one down.

On landing everyone who had the responsibility for a gun removed same from the turrets or position and returned the tubes and bolts to armament. Then to interrogation. There you turned in all your paperwork and were questioned by an intelligence officer who wrote down all this stuff and turned it in to someone and it was lost forever. Also in the I room you were offered a shot of whiskey. The flight surgeons were on hand and so were the chaplains. After all of this garbage was dispensed with you were free to try and catch a truck or a weapons carrier to the club so you could get something to eat. Then back to the hut where you would heat water in your canteen cup for shaving and then to the sack.

Thus endeth a typical mission.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In order to get from Snetterton Heath to anyplace in the rest of the world, one either had to take the London and Northeastern Railway or have enough rank to get an airplane or a car. None of the people on our crew had anything like enough rank, so when we went on pass we walked to the station at Eccles Road and caught the local to Cambridge, then to other points of interest such as London. The LNER bisected the base, with the railroad dividing the living quarters from the actual airfield. The only thing I can remember about the line was that it had tiny (by Santa Fe standards, the railroad that ran right by my Dad's lumberyard) locomotives and strange freight cars the English insisted on calling "wagons."

When you went on pass, you were required to carry your gas mask case. Since no one ever bothered to check on the contents, only that you were carrying it, it was used pretty much as luggage. It would hold without too many bulges two fifths of your favorite distilled beverage as well as a razor, comb, and other personal accessories.

There were four of us who usually went on pass together, Connell, Youngs, Ayer and me. Maluy also had a brother flying in the Eighth so he would go visit his brother. About the others I have no idea. All of us were, practically speaking, bumpkins. I was such a bumpkin that I even tried to book a room at Claridges, where I was immediately intercepted by a kindly grey-haired old gentleman in full formal dress and informed politely that there was no room at the inn. The guys usually left John and I to our own devices.

We learned, early in the tour, that the only place that served real food, things like beef and potatoes, was the Base Officers Mess, a place called Willow Run, due to its size. It was huge. It was also strictly segregated. There was a line and a section for "Company Grade Base Staff Officers" to ensure that peasants from the outlying areas would not sully the carpet or urinate in the potted palms where these sharply turned-out officers ate. There was another section for Base Staff Officers of Field Grade. And a totally walled-off area where only General Officers were allowed. Then there was the pit where the sign boldly proclaimed "Transient Officers." There we could take nourishment and not contaminate with our presence those with the responsibility for making earth-shaking decisions.

It was quite some time before I learned that the word "Brasserie" over the door meant "saloon" and not a shop for ladies' undergarments. From then on it was easy. John and I discovered a place in Grosvenor Square (where Willow Run was located) where the bartender assured us that he had an ample stock of Irish Whiskey. John was an Irishman, I was not. The supply was ample, because it was my belief it was made on the premises and that a peek under the bar would reveal a light bulb suspended over a crock filled with the working fluid. No experience in my life prepared me for this beverage. As a callow youth at OU I had sampled White Lightning sold at the Sinclair

station by the South Canadian River bridge. It was nearly paralyzing in its effect. The "Irish Whiskey" literally nailed one to the barstool. But it was available and we drank it as though we liked it.

One of the pleasures of London, to me at least, and if you were lucky enough to be there on a Sunday, was the concert in the park, Hyde Park, I think. There in the band shell, much like those in many rural towns in the States, would be a band, usually all brass but sometimes with woodwinds attached. I have kept a program through all these years of the afternoon I heard The Foden's Motor Works Band. There were two brothers in that band who were, without doubt, the finest trumpet players I have ever heard. A chair could be purchased for tuppence and you could spend the afternoon.

And then there were the guards at St. James's Palace, which was, we were told, the residence of the Prince of Wales. Since there was no incumbent prince at the time, we weren't sure why it was being guarded. The men weren't wearing their fancy regimentals during wartime, only that awful English woolen battle dress, but they were sharp in their evolutions when they presented arms. Any officer of any nationality rated a salute. As much stomping and rattling as was required of a British soldier to present arms with his Enfield sort of made you feel guilty. When you returned the salute, he had to reverse the stomping and rattling in order to get back to attention. Almost made one wish he had viewed the palace from across the street.

The more obvious delights of the city were found, of course, in Piccadilly Square, where the statue of Eros had been removed and the base covered with a plywood shell. Once I ran into an old high school friend, Warren Morris. We had a couple of lemonades (or something) and decided that this would make an excellent stage on which to practice our limited singing talents. Suiting the deed to the thought, we climbed the sides and gave all of London within earshot a rendition of our old school song, "Dear Classen High School We Love You," along with a really resounding chorus of the old theme song for an afternoon radio show, "Jack Armstrong, The All-American Boy," known as "Have You Tried Wheaties?" Some friendly Bobbies removed us from our perch and with a stern warning released us to the admiring crowd. I think we promptly went to the nearest Brasserie and had another lemonade. Or something.

There were, as legend tells us, ladies of the evening in abundance along the streets adjoining the Circus. Some were loud, some were vulgar, all were getting rich, both the young and the old. And by old, I mean wrinkled old hags who would have lots of fun for a cigarette. And some were people who wanted to make money without having to work at a factory. One such was a woman I met by the name of Mary King, who lived in the vicinity of Baron's Court, where the tube emerged from the ground. Mary was not only comely but a pleasant person who could carry on a conversation not entirely devoted to sex. She was, in short, an interesting woman whose happy home had been broken up when the Army shipped her fighter-pilot boyfriend back to North Carolina.

Just having a conversation with a female was worth the five-pound fee. I didn't have anything else to spend it on anyway.

Johnny and I visited the big PX in London just once. I bought a pair of shoes that fell apart the first time they got wet; they also offered watches and sheets and other requirements of military life, like cheesy uniforms.

One of the better entertainments for country boys like me and Johnny was riding the Underground, or Tube. For roughly a nickel U.S. you could ride the thing all day if you knew where to change trains. Connell and I would ride a triangle and you would never have to put up any more money. If you boarded at Piccadilly, rode to Oxford Circus, transferred to Tottenham Court Road, transferred again to Leicester Square and finally back to Piccadilly. It was fun for a couple of country boys, believe me. We stayed at the Winston Hotel in Jermyn Street on several passes. It wasn't a good hotel (not even an average one), but it did admit company grade officers, which was a rarity in the more fashionable parts of the city.

For some reason we spent one pass in Cambridge. I am almost sure we weren't broke, but just thought to make a break in our pattern, I guess. We found that Cambridge offered about as many creature delights as some dreary village. It did have a nice hotel but we never felt all that welcome. Cambridge was an RAF town and the RAF never missed a chance to vent their feelings about our pay and decorations. I don't think they liked us all that much. The RCAF was a different matter.

I made one pass, maybe two, to London alone. I can't recall exactly why now, it was probably the ruptured eardrum or after I had been shot. I had a sort of relative, the brother of my sister-in-law, Bill Harrison, who was one of those men who always found time to be nice to those younger than himself. Bill had had a long career in the Oklahoma National Guard and had received his commission through the Guard OCS. Prior to the war he had been an attorney, and, like everyone else, had done whatever he could to survive the Depression. An Oklahoma native was a general and provost marshal general for the U.S. Army in the UK, following a stint in the same job in Iceland; Bill was a full colonel and on his staff. I thought it might be a good idea to drop by and say hello as long as I was on the same island, anyway.

I made my way to Grosvenor Square, careful not to get in the way of any MPs on motorcycles with howling sirens who accompanied the higher brass throughout the town. This particular morning it must have been Eisenhower, since there were about 30 motorcycles clearing the way for what looked like a Packard sedan. I finally found Col. Harrison in one of the buildings adjoining the Square. He made me feel most welcome and invited me to join him and his new Polish wife, Sofia, for dinner. The opportunity for a free meal was too good to pass up.

I can't recall where this senior officer's club was located, but I found it and found immediately that I was totally out of my element. In comparison to those people, I looked like I had come from the bottom of a barrel. Dry cleaning at the 96th was

accomplished by our postal clerk, who used 100-octane avgas as his fluid, and an iron warmed over a coke stove as his mangle. Add the damp weather and the general wrinkling that came with a train ride, and I looked like a sackful of doorknobs. Bill, noble soul that he was, introduced me as if he was unaware of my appearance. I never shook the hands of so many colonels in my life. I don't remember the meal. I guess it was good if they were feeding it to field-grade people. My other solo pass was taken to watch an American football game at Wembley Stadium.

Passes, taken all-in-all, were a lot of fun, especially if you had a modicum of tourist blood in your system. I must admit that I never attended the infamous Windmill Theatre, since I have had a lifelong aversion to nude women that were unattainable. I think that Connell and I made every sight we could while we had the chance.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Once in a while the moving finger would rove, then stop, then point at an unsuspecting young officer and write across his forehead, "You are Duty Officer Tonight." It wasn't such a bad deal in some instances. It meant that your crew stood down for the next mission, if there was to be one, and that you would have a heck of a good bed for the night. It could also mean that you would be up all night and wind up in the tower in the cold grey of the dawn watching other people go off to get shot at. It would also mean, if you hadn't taken care to be friendly with the mess cooks, that you would get terribly hungry before you had a chance to eat anything again. And if you were an unfortunate soul who had never developed a taste for coffee, it was a really long night indeed.

I had the misfortune to get grounded to due a ruptured ear drum about midway in my tour. The ear was packed with sulfa, I was told not to listen to anything too hard (the Flight Surgeon's little essay into medical humor) and sent back to the hut to loaf. It meant no flying, period, until the Flight Surgeon gave you the go ahead. It also indicated to the people at Group Headquarters that here was a body that could be called upon to be Duty Officer night after night until he went crazy, whichever came first. The boredom was bad enough, but the chattering teletypes and the ringing of the scrambler phone could contribute to the loss, however temporary, of one's sanity. I got the Golden Nod from Operations for something like a week while waiting for my ear to heal. The Duty Officer reported to Group Operations shortly after the evening meal and before any word could come down that the Group as a whole was stood down for the next day and the bar could remain open until the last drunk tottered unsteadily away to his bunk. He could only hope that Lady Moe didn't beat him to it.

Upon arrival at Operations you were offered a cup of coffee by the Operations Sergeant, a man who was used to Second Lieutenants who didn't know what the hell they were supposed to do if they were the Duty Officer. He would indicate a comfortable cot, complete with a mattress (instead of the Limey Biscuits) on which you could sleep, if that was your desire. Otherwise there was nothing to do until the teletypes started to clatter away like a bunch of nervous old hens with a fox in the coop. You could doodle on the message pads; you could wish you were at the Club eating a melted cheese sandwich prepared by the ubiquitous Whitey; you could yawn; you could twiddle your fingers. After the first shot at the job the wise officer brought a book or a deck of cards. Solitaire beats yawning and even one of the little wartime books (I can't remember their exact nomenclature) that were sent to the troops overseas was a better deal. You didn't dare nod off until 2300 hours, as we military types are wont to say. The minute you got really relaxed the mission would come in. After 2300 it was usually safe , unless the upcoming mission was a shallow

penetration, one of those things to France or Belgium or Holland could come in as late as 0300 and still get off the ground and back before dark.

I would try my best to relax, play a little solitaire, read a little of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn", a current best seller, yawn a lot and wish that someone would come over from the club with something to eat. Whitey was faithful. He never forgot a Duty Officer who would cheerfully pay for his wares. He would show up around 2200 with some of the melted cheese deals and maybe an ersatz coke. He would be overpaid in the hope that he would stay and break up the monotony. He never did.

Suddenly the bell would ring on the battery of teletypes, followed immediately by the bell on the red scrambler phone, used to confuse and bemuse the enemy who probably already knew more about the upcoming mission than the various Groups. In the nearby town of Banham one could go to the Kings Head or the Green Lion along about sunset and the townsfolk could usually tell you how deep you were going the next day. How they divined this I shall never know but they were, more times than not, right about the whole thing. The Duty Officer would grab the red telephone while the Operations Sergeant tended the teletypes, which I was told could unscramble code as they went along. Pencil in hand, we Duty Folks all reported who we were and that we were ready.

That first night I really tried to write as fast as the Wing (or was it the Division?) Operations person could talk. It was a miserable failure after I got through how many airplanes we were supposed to provide. I never did get it all down as to target, courses to be flown, loads to be carried, fuel on board and all the other myriad details of getting three groups of airplanes into the air at the same time and roughly headed in the same direction.

I was devastated. I had let the 96th down. I was sure that everyone else had gotten it all copied before the scrambler went dead, and here I sat, in the sorry position of having to call Wing (or Division) back and ask, "Where was it you said we were going and how many of what kind of bombs was it we were to carry?" I could see the Court Martial Board nodding grimly at this recitation of my shortcomings, then discussing which would be the better course; firing squad or rope or even worse, a sudden transfer to the infantry where I would be given a rifle and told to hope for the best. I was still sweating blood when I confessed to the Operations Sergeant that I had failed to get all of the information from the rapid-fire delivery of our late caller. He grinned, having seen this before, I am sure, and said, "No big deal Lieutenant. It's all right here on the teletype." I breathed again. At least no transfer to the infantry.

Then we got busy. A call to the Group Commander, Group Operations Officer, Ordnance, fuel, a call to each Squadron CQ to have him wake the Crew Chiefs, then the Crews. A call to the mess halls indicating at what hour breakfast would be served to the crews. Wake up the Intelligence Officer so he could start pulling maps and

target photos, the Group Navigator and the Group Bombardier so that they could plan their presentations. With everyone called one got a short breath before the wheels began to arrive. The Operations Officer was usually first, then the Colonel, bustling about as though he really was the Big Planner, without whose help the mission would never get off the ground. Then Intelligence, who asked for the Duty Officer's help in collating the information on the target. At least it was something to do and much better than listening, with a rapt expression on your face (no matter how far away one's mind was wandering) to the Colonel. With everything in place and the fuel bowsers honking their horns as they went about topping off the tanks and the ordnance folks rumbling around on their bomb trailers, the crews would be awakened. The CQ would bang open the door, call out the crews that were to fly, advise when breakfast would be served and when briefing would begin, turn on the lights to make sure his wards were awake, then slam the door for emphasis as he left.

With nothing else to do, the Duty Officer, all of his responsibilities now taken over by the higher brass, would wander over to the mess hall on the off-chance that there would be real eggs instead of the powdered variety. The crews would come staggering in; the old crews quiet and still half asleep, the newer boys boisterous and wide awake. The breakfast, despite the much-rumored "Combat Breakfast" of fresh eggs, lean bacon, lightly buttered toast made of real white bread, would be the same old powdered eggs, powdered milk, corn flakes, sometimes some greasy English bacon and coffee. To my knowledge no one ever tried to drink the powdered milk but once and then the habit was broken for life. It tasted more like a popular laxative than anything else. Having eaten the Duty Officer wandered back over to Operations and waited for some form of transport to take him to the tower. Why we were expected to be in the tower has never been made quite clear to me, but there we were, with the hard working tower operators and a bunch of visiting brass, sometimes even the kind with stars on their shoulders, who came to see that no one blew up on take off. No one ever did when I had the duty, thank goodness. At least not on the runway or perimeter track.

I have never much thought of myself as a romantic but one scene has stuck in my mind all of these years. The first round engine being started in the pre dawn dark ... a few barks, a little rough running, a torch of flame maybe twelve feet long from the stack, a couple of backfires then a steady rumble as the engine decided that it would run again for one more day. When the lead ship of Vampire Red rolled on to the perimeter track, followed by the other lead squadron airplane, the mission would have begun. The run up, the roll onto our long runway, or at least our longest runway, the flashing green Aldis Lamp from the the Caravan at the end of the runway. The engines scream under full power, the brakes are released and the 17 slowly starts down the runway, to be replaced by two in the lead. This act is repeated until all the chicks are in the air and we can all tromp down the wet steel stairs and

get back to whatever it was that we were doing. The Duty Officer, although on call for a twenty-four hour period, heads for his sack and some sleep – hoping against hope that nothing untoward will happen to any of "his" airplanes until they leave the UK.

One of the corollary duties attending this office is writing reports on accidents and/or crashes that involve his Group's aircraft while over English soil. He can't do much about anything over the North Sea or Germany, but he sure can have a chore when someone fouls up on his own ground. We had one of these "incidents," as they were called, during my solid week as Duty Officer. A loud mouthed fighter pilot, assigned to Air Sea Rescue and flying practice missions, was involved, as was his P-47. While our new crews were taking off one bright afternoon, he stood in the tower and bragged about how he would keep the gunners, who were shooting movies of him with their guns, wide awake and alert.

"For God's sake," I implored, "don't hit one of them or I'll be up all night, writing the damned thing up.'

Sure enough, he ran into one, which ran into another which ran into yet a third airplane and there we were, in the soup. Since all of the crews were new I felt no sense of personal loss. I didn't even know their names, nor did anyone else in the various squadrons. They were just new crews. But they were, for the most part, just as dead as if they had been seasoned veterans. I think a few managed to jump but the others, along with the Jug pilot, were bound for Cambridge and a military funeral.

I did my thing. I helped identify the remains and gathered such personal objects as smashed wedding rings and shattered and bent wrist watches, putting it all in little bags tagged with their names, ranks and serial numbers, and carried the whole lot up to the various ground execs so that they could write letters and send the battered personal items home. One, a flattened wedding ring, never made it home. Our squadron ground exec decided that a bloody and flattened ring was no item to send home to a grieving young widow. I concurred.

After I was declared fit to fly I was tapped only one more time as Duty Officer. I loaded myself with PX rations and headed for operations. The Sergeant greeted me with a wide grin and told me to go home or over to the club and get potted. The word had just come in the the 96th was stood-down for the following day.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

As an aid to memory, and Lord knows I need it, I have a copy of the diary kept by our top turret gunner and flight engineer, Bill Wayland. Our assigned aircraft was 44-6170, Paintbrush M for Mike, otherwise known as "Sittin' Pretty." But we flew whatever was airworthy on that day. Like all good trades, the perks came with seniority. As a brand new crew, we were generally assigned "war-weary" airplanes. We also discovered on our first mission (to Abbeville, France, on July 6, 1944) that it was necessary to post a guard on the airplane so that more senior crews would not steal what they considered your "extra" ammunition. In fact, we ran out, which leaves you with a certain naked feeling in hostile airspace.

On our second and third missions, to Bohlen and Stuttgart, Germany, we flew in a worn out piece of junk known as "The Reluctant Dragon." One of the most reluctant parts of the the dragon were the bomb-bay doors. On two consecutive missions I had to crank them up by hand, which involved sitting on the catwalk in the bomb bay and turning a hand crank as empty space yawned beneath me. It seemed like I turned the crank a hundred times to get the doors to close a quarter inch, and it was hazardous not just for me but for the whole crew. The drag of the open doors caused us to fall out of formation and I got to sit on the catwalk for what seemed like hours with a walkaround oxygen bottle hanging from my face. This created another problem, because refilling the bottle pulled the oxygen system down at an alarming rate. I wrote it up the first time, and told the ground crew chief about it. The second time I "red-crossed" the airplane, which pissed off the line armorer. In fact, when I mentioned it to him, he said, "Tough shit, lieutenant."

Well, I jumped through my hat and pulled rank for exactly the second time in my military career (you may recall the first time was with Staff Sgt. Swanson, the Minnesota Miscarriage). I stalked off to report him to the ground exec, the courtly Major Jones. Deacon brought me up short when I started cussing and shouting, and said, "Lieutenant, if you are going to speak to me like that, you will call me Major." I calmed down, but the line armorer soon found himself short a couple of stripes. I could have cheerfully strangled the SOB with my bare hands.

Bill noted that on our fourth mission, to Munich, Cleon Ayer, our tailgunner, succumbed to anoxia. As bombardier, I checked on everybody every 15 minutes to make sure they were conscious. On this mission, Ayer pulled his oxygen hose loose and passed out. The cure was to hook him back up again and hope he was still breathing. Bill says Cleon was out for 17 minutes, which is a pretty long time. Cleon was the only person I ever knew who could get a cigarette lit and keep it that way at twenty thousand feet. And when he was squirming around back there he would, on occasion, pull his wires loose and then we couldn't raise him and someone would have to crawl back there to see if he was still alive.

Missions five, six and seven, were to Stuttgart again, Kiel, and Regensburg, home to the plant that built ME-109s. As flight engineer, Bill noted how many holes we collected in the airplanes we were flying. At Stuttgart, five holes; Kiel, no damage; Regensburg, five holes again, all in different B-17s. Our eighth mission was to a place that we would visit over and over, Merseburg, home to a synthetic oil plant that extracted petroleum from oil shale. The Germans were proud of the place and put enough guns there to prove it. It was mean as hell, and on this mission the lead and deputy lead ships collided (eight parachutes noted), so we missed the target.

A note on bombing at this stage of the war. Generally, the lead and deputy lead ships did the actual bomb run. When the bombardiers on those airplanes judged that the correct moment had arrived, they dropped smoke bombs and the rest of us dropped on their signal. Which made it much easier on those of us who were naturally lazy, although you never knew when you would be tapped to be one of those ships.

Number nine was a return to Merseburg. Bill says we collected five holes in "Chute the Works," had P-51 and P-38 fighters as escorts as well as "mixed Jerry fighters." Smoke from the raid reached 20,000 feet. On mission ten we flew supplies to the Maquis in the French Alps near Albertville. We dropped supply canisters while flying in formation below the mountain tops; he says it was "the most beautiful spot in my travels." It was certainly lovely, if a little nerve-wracking.

On number 11 we started for Magdeburg, Germany, but about 30 minutes into Germany our number three engine decided it wasn't going to go with us. We fell out of formation on a day when there were enough German fighters around to make one nervous, not that we weren't already. P-51s shot two ME-109s off of us; we had to lighten the load, so I set the bomb sight intervalometer for 100 feet and let the bombs go. I couldn't have done this if I had tried, but the bombs walked right down the main street of a little town with ten or 12 houses. I would imagine they were surprised. The last bomb hit in a clump of trees and caused a tremendous secondary explosion. As we were limping home, we picked up a crippled B-24 and, wonder of wonders, a P-38 with a bright red Statue of Liberty painted on the nose. Oh boy, we thought, fighter cover! We made it back over the channel, and the fighter jockey came on the radio and said, "Boy, am I glad I found you guys! I have a runaway prop governor and I was afraid the Krauts were going to jump me!" With that, he peeled off, leaving us a little chagrined.

We had two long missions to Czechoslovakia and Poland on 13 and 14, Brux and Politz, both of which were oil plants. Brux was the only place I ever saw colored flak, which was pretty damned accurate. We collected 35 flak holes and damaged the main spar in the right wing badly enough that it had to be changed. Bill notes that Baughman's crew ditched, but all were OK. At Politz, we only picked up two holes but the group lost three B-17s in flames, according to Bill's diary.

Our fifteenth mission was an aborted trip to Berlin due to cloud cover up to 31,000 feet. It counted toward our total since we were past six degrees east longitude. Bill's

diary says, "No Hits, No Runs, No Errors?" Mission 16 was a trip to Bremen, Germany, and the last mission on which we had Harold Barlow as pilot. He evidently developed an unspecified stomach complaint and disappeared from our lives. In my case, his absence was unmourned.

Number 19 was a mission to Nuremburg; the diary says, "J.B.'s 'Lucky Day'." J.B. was Johnny Connell, who picked up a Purple Heart after his windshield was shot out and glass and flak fragments hit him in the head. Three 96th B-17s exploded over the target, Bill says. Mission 20 brought us a new regular pilot and one of the finest people you would ever want to meet, Charlie Shinault. On our next mission, one to Bremen, we flew for the first time as element lead, meaning I had to earn my pay. I don't know if we were assigned the post because we had Shinault or if it was purely a product of seniority. The following mission, to Mainz, Germany, we flew as low squadron lead, all the while collecting holes and becoming more and more aware of the fact that we were engaged in a hairy business.

Any comment on the next several missions would be repetitive. We bombed marshaling yards and got shot at and got more and more scared. On our next return to Merseburg on Nov. 2, our 29th mission, it got about as bad as it could get. The diary says "intense, accurate flak," Sittin' Pretty lost engines no. 1 and 4, collected six holes and Bill says it was his lucky day. I wish he had been more specific, because I don't remember if he was shot or not. Three days later at Ludwigshaven we had another ordeal which I must have wiped from my memory. Bill mentions two engines shot out on the same side, a bad situation; the instruments were out, control cables were cut, and the hydraulic system was out. Bill was lucky again, for an unstated reason, and to top it all, the weather was bad.

Thirty-one was a trip to Bingen. A long, long day. As a quick explanation of what happened, there were two types of bomb shackles, one with rounded shoulders ideal for double-loading 100-pounders, the other with square shoulders, which prevented the steel cables used for double-loading to slip free. Naturally the shackles with square shoulders were on the bottom stations, where 100-pound GP bombs were double-loaded. On top were two 500-pound M-17 incendiary clusters; I think the plan was that the 100-pounders would make kindling for the incendiary bombs. The M-17s were held together with steel straps which would release after a certain amount of time, scattering the little incendiary bombs far and wide. Anyway, I said, "Bombs away!" and Bob Breese, the radio operator, who was supposed to make sure the bombs were actually away, said, "Like hell!"

When I got back there, there were loose hundred-pounders and the two damned 500-pound M-17 incendiary clusters on top of the unreleased bottom tier, all with the arming vanes gone. The M-17, which was a bundle of two-pound thermite bombs, had a time fuse on it and I had no idea how much time I had left. On the ground it took a big wrench and a cheater to loosen the fuses. I got those two out bare-handed in

nothing flat. Then I extracted the tail fuses from all the loose 100-pounders. As I extracted the fuses, I handed them through the radio room door at the rear of the bomb bay to Breezy. I figured he was dumping them out the photo hatch in his compartment. Bill and I then had to try and re-rack those 500-pound clusters, which we did, even though neither one of us weighed more than 130 pounds soaking wet. Then we grabbed the loose 100-pounders by the tail fins, pulled them back and let them hit the back bulkhead of the bomb bay as they fell free. I asked him a couple of days later what he did with them, and he told me he saved them in case I needed them. I turned white and rushed out to the airplane with a couple of armorers and we gingerly removed the live fuses and disposed of them properly.

Bill's last entry and his last mission, his 33rd and my 34th, doesn't do justice to the fucked up mess that was that trip to Merseburg. The flak was unbelievable; you could see another mission to the south, and the black-and-purple blobs of airplanes exploding; on our end, we lost 56. Our B-17, a brand new one (the perks of seniority), had three cylinders blown off the bottom of engine no. 4, the right tire and oleo were gone, one of the turbo waste gates was blown out of the left wing, we lost the bomb bay doors and the ball turret was smashed. Bill noted there were more than 300 holes in this airplane, which was brand-new. The 96th lost seven or eight out of the 16 we started with. We ground-looped on landing, joining several others that got there first. I was hit over the left eye, in the left wrist, and the left thigh. I was only aware that I had been wounded because I had to keep wiping blood out of my goggles. I finished the bomb run and stood up and saw that blood was coming out of the top of my flying boot. I still didn't hurt, but I went back to the cot in the radio room anyway, and Bob Breese gave me a shot of morphine. Instead of stupefying me, it cranked me up. Charlie Shinault said when the airplane came to a halt and the ambulance rolled up with medics on hand carrying a stretcher, I bounced out of the airplane, ran over and got in the vehicle all on my own. I spent a few days in the hospital where they sewed me up and failed to notice there was a chunk missing from my skull (that was determined after I was in the hospital in California). They decided I wasn't hurt so badly that I couldn't finish my tour, so I flew my 35th mission with a hut mate's crew and they finally sent me home.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Since I was a low-priority item, I returned to the United States aboard His Majesty's Round Bottomed Tub *Louis Pasteur*. Before I left England, I had traded a 10-man liferaft (don't ask me where I obtained it) for an SS captain's uniform and a really neat plexiglas model of a B-17 flying over a globe. Of course my luggage was robbed.

The Army, in all its wisdom, put me in the hospital in California, not someplace convenient like New York, which entailed a week-long passage across the continent in a troop train. Imagine hundreds of GIs crammed into a space about 10 feet wide and maybe a half a mile long, given the lowest possible priority and the worst possible equipment and you have a wartime troop train. I was seated next to an infantry major on a stretch through Tennessee. We were crammed into chair cars, and you had to be a pretty good contortionist to stretch out enough to sleep. I had the window seat and he was on the aisle; the passage through the middle of the car was crammed with barracks bags. Anyway, there was an MP, a corporal, working his way through the car. Why MPs thought they had to be such assholes, I have no idea, but this one slapped his nightstick on the soles of the major's shoes, and said, "Let me see your orders, soldier," evidently being unable to see the major's rank insignia. The major woke up with a start, and straightened up, his gold leaves becoming visible. I had never seen an MP actually shrink before. The major enquired if the corporal was in the habit of assaulting soldiers when asking for their orders. He also asked where the corporal's MP unit was assigned (Little Rock), and who his commanding officer was. We pulled into Little Rock, and the major asked me to come along as a witness, and I did witness the most thorough ass chewing of an MP lieutenant I ever heard.

Being in the hospital wasn't bad. We could do pretty much whatever we liked, as long as we made our appointments. They sewed me up pretty quickly which left me to sample the delights of Los Angeles. I had been out there in the summer of 1940, trying to get a job as a trumpet player, with limited success, so I knew a little about the town.

We used to start our evenings at a bar at Wilshire and Western in Los Angeles, where a black barman made the best Zombies known to man. He would use a spoon to layer the rum, from dark to light, all perfectly stratified and guaranteed to nail your fanny to the barstool. When we had finished our drinks and were prepared to stagger out the door, he would lean across the bar, slap us on the shoulder, and say, "Come on back, my Zombie-drinkin' friends!"

For a jazz lover like me, Los Angeles was heaven. Coleman Hawkins had a combo at one place, and Stan Kenton launched his band while I was there, making me a lifelong fan.

I met a girl named Lil and we got married, a little hastily, as it turned out. Shortly after my return to Oklahoma City, we got divorced. Mid-America was evidently not to her liking.

When I was adjudged sufficiently healed to be a proper Air Corps officer, I was assigned to my alma mater, the bombardier school at Midland, Texas, as an instructor. Far from there being a shortage of bombardiers, there was now a glut on the market, and more and more of us were arriving from foreign shores. I was fortunate to have arrived somewhat early, because at least I had a job, or several, really. I was assigned as mess officer for the enlisted men's mess hall, which meant I was personally, financially responsible for inventory, from forks to potatoes. There was a black cook who would pour bags of flour into a mixer and magically produce delicious pound cake. I asked him once how he knew the correct mixture. He said, "I just multiplies."

I finally learned to make enlisted men exiting the mess hall jump up and down. If they jingled, I made them empty their pockets. It was amazing how much and what kind of things they would try to steal, up to and including the aluminum mess trays. I was also "compliance officer," which meant I was supposed to make sure the enlisted men went to see the VD films. At some point, I'm sure, I would have instructed somebody on how to use the Norden bombsight, but it never came to that.

I spent several interesting stints as Aerodrome Officer of the Day, two of which resulted in extensive and lengthy correspondence with the War Department, and later the Department of the Air Force. I was in the control tower early one morning when a P-39 pilot called for permission to land after performing what was called a "tactical approach." The fighter jockey would come over the end of the runway and pitch up and around, dropping his landing gear and plopping down right at the end of the strip. I looked at the airfield SOP, and it said to grant permission if there was no other traffic. So I gave him the go-ahead, and he promptly stalled out and fatally crashed right at the end of the runway. I hit the alarm button and the fire laddies rushed out to clean up the mess.

The other incident involved an officer who was just back from overseas. We received a call from the Midland police saying they had a man in custody, and would we please come get him. Apparently he had gotten a little drunk and belligerent, tearing apart a beer joint and stacking all the furniture and several patrons in the corner. A number of burly Midland cops managed to take him to jail, where he jumped over the counter and broke the booking sergeant's leg. I went down there with an ambulance, a straitjacket and four or five of the biggest MPs I could find. It took us 45 minutes to get this guy into the ambulance and back to the airfield. We put him in the stockade wearing nothing but his underwear, and somehow he managed to burn the stockade to the ground. The "reply-by-endorsement" letters lasted until I finally left the Air Force Reserve in the early 60s.

Midland was ruled by the same chickenshit Miami Beach 90-day wonders I had encountered before I went overseas. I don't know if it was jealousy over the fact that they didn't get into combat and therefore lacked the fruit salad those of us who had been shot at had earned, or if Miami simply instilled the chickenshit, but it was rife at

Midland. I remember coming back to the base after a pass. I was wearing a field jacket, which was really just a windbreaker; this was a violation of uniform regulations at MAAF, so the MPs at the gate wrote me up, and I had to reply by endorsement about why I was out of uniform. I didn't wear my ribbons usually, and the authorities at MAAF didn't allow you to wear the insignia from your combat outfit. In most places, you wore your current formation's insignia on your left shoulder, and your former combat formation's insignia on your right. MAAF frowned on this practice. So one night I was at the officer's club, and I still limped a little from the flak wound to my left leg. This comic genius says to me, "What did you do? Slip in the shower?" Which for some reason made me extremely angry. I went back to my BOQ, donned my ribbons and marched back to the O club. I jerked this wag out of his chair and asked him if he had anything to say now. He was probably right when he said there was no reason to be all upset.

I was fortunate enough to have a job, at least, and avoided some of it. So many officers were coming back from Europe in the spring and summer of 1945 that there was no way to utilize all of them. The CG at Midland at the time decided that it would be a good idea for idle officers, including field-grade officers, to pass their time by engaging in close-order drill. Eventually complaints worked their way upward and brought the attention of the Army inspector general and eventually a house-cleaning. I remember the inspector general, a lieutenant colonel, saying the Midland CG had "an unfortunate personality."

My dad and I met in San Antonio when he went down for a lumberman's convention. I got a room in the famous Menger Hotel, and he called and said he was in the lobby. I came down the stairs wearing my uniform and ribbons. He snorted and said, "Who'd have thought you'd ever make a soldier?" This opinion seems to have been almost unanimous among my elders. Which brings me back to the beginning. A friend of mine and I had traveled to Abilene, Texas, in a fruitless search for female companionship. We had just stepped out of a drugstore and lunch counter and just before us was an Army brigadier general. Naturally we saluted, not expecting anything else. This brigadier general exploded, "HUSTON! You're the LAST man I ever expected to see in an officer's uniform!" It was my Professor of Military Science and Tactics from The University of Oklahoma.