A MILITARY ADVENTURE

1943 - 1944 - 1945

FOR MY FOUR DAUGHTERS

By

W. Hanes Lancaster, Jr.
U.S. Army Air Corps
20th Air Force
XX Bomber Command - 58th Bomber Wing (VH)
462nd Bomb Group (VH)
768th Bomb Squadron

"Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous, but to even greater extent than the sea is unremittingly unforgiving of carelessness". ---Anonymous

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The facts discussed and reported in this adventure may or may not be historically or factually accurate, but they express my observations from my personal point of view and experiences. This is a compilation of mission diaries, notes, and letters written during the time period covered. This information, as I saw it, is at the express request of my four daughters.

I dedicate this writing to Susan L. Rule, Polly L. Torbett, Ellyn L. Smith, and Mary Hanes L. Lockett. Further, I dedicate this writing to my loving wife, Barbara Boyd Lancaster, who put up with the loss of my companionship and attentions during the long period of my compiling and writing this adventure.

---W. Hanes Lancaster, Jr.
October 12, 1997

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FORWARD

Moving from boyhood to manhood is an evolution that takes time and years. However, war often compresses that evolutionary process. As backgound to my military service, my four daughters have urged me to document my life throughout my military service.

My parents, Walter Hanes Lancaster and Evelyn Hurt Lovelace Lancaster, both Virginians, moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, after their marriage on June 23, 1923, in Halifax, Virginia. Dad had obtained a franchise to distribute Willard Storage Batteries and Goodyear tires for that area. He had rented a small frame house on Vine Street in Highland Park. My parents lived there when I, Walter Hanes Lancaster, Jr., was born on April 26, 1924, at Erlanger Hospital.

Moving shortly to a larger house on the corner of Vine and Orchard Knob Avenue made little impression on me due to my young age. Dad's two brothers, Bill and Stephen, moved in with us, as did Mom's brother, Stephen Lovelace. I have been told that my babysitter was a German shepherd dog, Jean, who watched over me when I was put on a blanket in the yard, even to the extent of pulling me back on the blanket when I started to wander. Of course, having three uncles living with us destined me for a great deal of attention.

Dad's business of automotive parts and motor rebuilding flourished due to his hard work, coupled with his insight of the city's needs and his honest salesmanship and personality. In 1928, a great new house at 468 North Crest Road on Missionary Ridge became our new home, and Dad also bought a new Stinson airplane which could carry five people with a pilot and copilot. His pilot was John Coaster, a German, who flew for the German forces against us during World War I. I spent quite a few hours with John Coaster, flying on trips with Dad to Atlanta, Birmingham, and other cities to see clients. The story of John Coaster is another story altogether for another time, but being with him almost daily certainly whetted my appetite in later life to fly.

With the stock market crash in October, 1929, the economy of our country began to weaken. The financial demands on Dad mounted over the next three years, but he was able to sustain his business. However, with the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and a Congress of Democrats in 1932, Dad's business faltered when the Democrats passed the National Recovery Act (NRA). Dad refused to sign the NRA Code, which he deemed socialistic. His refusal to sign caused his business to lose all his contracts with the local, state, and federal governments for automotive parts and motor rebuilding, a large part of his business. As the result of this action, Dad lost our home, all of his real estate investments, and all of his other investments. Only by making a pledge to his creditors to completely pay them over an extended period of time, which his creditors accepted, was he able to avert bankruptcy.

I had been enrolled in the Bright's School in the first grade in 1930, but after one year there and the result of Dad's misfortunes, I moved to start the second grade in the Missionary Ridge School, a public school, in 1931. I remained in Missionary Ridge School from the second through the sixth grade in 1936.

When we lost our home in 1933, Dr. E. White Patton, who lived near us on Missionary Ridge, heard of our loss and called Dad to offer to rent his house to us, since he was semi-retired and spent most of his time in Florida. The offer was gratefully accepted and we moved into Dr. Patton's house. In 1934, Dr. Patton decided to remain in Florida, so he sold the house to Dad. The house was at 324 North Crest Road.

Dad's business began to strengthen in 1934 at a smaller location at 504 Broad Street, and the economy also began to get a bit stronger. The U. S. Supreme Court had declared the National Recovery Act (NRA) as unconstitutional, voiding the socialistic act, but the damage to Dad by President Roosevelt had already been done.

In the fall of 1934, the city of Chattanooga changed its "Blue Laws" to allow movie theaters to open on Sundays. One Sunday, February 10, 1935, Mom, Dad, and I went to the Tivoli Theater after a late afternoon visit with the Harry Carbaugh family and dinner. In the midst of the show, Mr. Carbaugh came into the theater, found us, and told us our house was on fire. Driving out McCallie Avenue towards the Ridge, I recall the discussion in the car that the fire must not have amounted to much, since we saw no flames along the Ridge in the vicinity of our house. As we got close to our house, we could not see the house since it set back off the road and above it. We encountered fire trucks and police cars which prevented our being able to go into the driveway from a back road, so we approached the house from the front, leaving the car and climbing the flagstone steps up to the property. As we reached the top of the steps, Mom fainted on seeing what was left of our house. Only the two ends of the house were partially standing with the center nothing but a pile of smouldering rubble. It was obvous that everything was gone!

I knew my dog, Bob, should be around some place, so I set out to find him. One of the firemen told me that Bob kept trying to run into the burning house, so they tied him to a tree on the edge of the property. The next thing the firemen saw was Bob running into the house, having chewed the rope in two, climbing the steps to the second floor, and turning into the room at the top of the steps just was the house collapsed. That was my bedroom!

Very few items were salvaged from the fire. The only ones saved were those that got smothered by the collapse of the structure. Dad had the ashes sifted and was able to recover a small bit of Mom's jewelry and some silverware. My .22 caliber rifle was found with a broken stock and the blueing burned off the barrel. (The pump action still works on the rifle today.) All of our clothes were destroyed, as was all furniture.

In the weeks following the loss of our home, Mom and Dad stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Carbaugh while looking for a place to live. As for me, I moved around a bit, since I had to live with someone whose clothes I could wear for awhile. Most of the time, I spent at the homes of my very dear friends, Jim Ballard and Warren Gardner, both of whom shared their clothes with me until Dad could rebuild my wardrobe.

Dad rented a furnished house on South Crest Road on the Ridge, and we settled in while starting to rebuild a new house on the site where the one burned. Though the original house had four bedrooms, the new one had three with a nice large master bedroom. It was very comfortable, and the family felt it was getting settled again when in February, 1936, Dad's business experienced a fire. Behind Dad's business across a small open area, there was a restaurant with a kitchen exhaust fan blowing into the open area. Grease from the kitchen caught fire and the fire was blown into the storage area of Dad's business where alcohol antifreeze was stored. The antifreeze in cans exploded sending a sheet of flames through the building and out the front on Broad Street. Fortunately, the damage was not as bad as it appeared, since the sheet of flame caused by the explosion only seared most of the items in the front of the shop, and insurance was able to cover the damage.

Our new home was completed in the spring of 1936, and in the fall I entered the McCallie School, a private military school with one of the best scholastic standings in the South. I felt privileged that Dad could send me to McCallie. Several of my closest friends, including Warren Gardner and Jim Ballard, joined me there.

The six years I spent at McCallie were wonderful ones! However, Dad joined with J. W. Birdwell in an application before the Federal Communications Commissions in Washington, D. C. for a radio station in Johnson City, Tennessee. After public hearings lasting over two years before the F.C.C., they received the grant for the license to build Radio Station WJHL. The station after construction went on the air on December 7, 1938, and we moved to Johnson City in June, 1939, after I finished my freshman year at McCallie. Dad rented a house between Oak and Elm Streets on Unaka Avenue for short period, then in late summer our furniture was moved from Chattanooga to a rented house at 1407 North Roan Street in Johnson City.

Knowing that it would be expensive for me to be a boarding student at McCallie, I assumed I would be attending high school in Johnson City, but Dad told me I was to return to McCallie to continue my education. It was several years later that I learned that Dad had cashed in his life insurance in order to send me back to school at McCallie.

From September, 1939, to January, 1940, I lived with friends of Mom and Dad, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Keeney, on Woodlawn Drive. "Uncle Phil" was Vice President of Engineering for the Brock Candy Company in Chattanooga. The Keeneys were absolutely wonderful to me during that period. "Aunt Mildred" kept cookies ready for me when I walked in from school each day. In the mornings, "Uncle Phil" drove me to school as he went to work, then I would walk home through the tunnel each afternoon.

In January, 1940, I moved in with Jamie and Stephen Lovelace, my aunt and uncle, and Mom's brother and sister-in-law. They lived at 3200 Mission Drive just through the McCallie Avenue tunnel from McCallie. Jamie's brother, Johnny O'Barr, had moved out, so there was a space for me. Dad paid Jamie and Stephen $25.00 per month for my room and board. My room was originally a sewing room, so there wasn't much room for furniture. I had a half bed and a chest of drawers, plus a small closet. There were three windows, two along the side of the bed and one at the head. In winter, a heavy comforter was very necessary.

My household job with Jamie and Stephen was to unbank the furnace fire each winter morning at 6:30AM so the water would be hot for shaving. I would also shovel fresh coal into the fire to keep the fire going for the day. In the mild and warm days when the furnace was not needed, I would build a fire in the monkey stove in the basement to heat water for the house. After dinner each night, I would help Jamie wash and dry the dishes. By riding to McCallie with Stephen each school day, I was usually at school by 7:15AM, giving me plenty of time to review my homework and get ready for my classes that day.

Living with Jamie and Stephen certainly taught me independence and helped me mature, since I had to make my own decisions on many things; such as, study times, responsibility, meeting deadlines, and personal appearance. Often, Jamie would ask me to attend a movie with them on a school night, so I had to decide whether my homework or the movie should come first. Seldom did I ever go out on a school night.

Throughout my six years at McCallie, I maintained a good scholastic average with particular emphasis on English and Math. In every grade, I participated in sports. I played football in every grade, making the varsity in my junior and senior years. In my senior year, I was the quarterback, handling all the punting, passing, and much of the running from the old single wing formation. On defense, I was the safety man. However, after the start of my senior year, I broke my ankle during practice and was out for the majority of the season. In the season between football and track, I played soccer in order to keep my legs in shape for track. In track, I was on the varsity team for three years. Prior to my senior year, I competed in the broad jump, sprint relays, and the sprints in the 100-yard dashes and the 220-yard dashes. Our coach was Mr. Bob McCallie who held the school record in the 220-yard low hurdle race at

26.4 seconds. During the track season, "Mr. Bob" would work with me after our regular practice session to prepare me for running the hurdles, both low and high. He would never put me into a meet prior to my senior year, saying he was developing my stride. In my senior year in the spring of 1942, he said he felt my stride was ready to compete in the hurdles. My high hurdles were not my best due to the height of the hurdles and my height did not allow me to just step over them. However, in the 220-yard low hurdles, I never lost a race and I won the Mid-South with a record-breaking time of 25.4 seconds, breaking my coach's record by a full second.

My senior year at McCallie was a real delightful one. I was the battalion commander, a major, and vice president of our senior class. My sponsor was Barbara Boyd which added to my pleasure and whom I told Mr. "Bud" Burns I intended to marry some day. I was with my very close friends of Jim Ballard and Warren Gardner from the days of grammar school, plus others in Jim Talley of Knoxville, Jimmy Adams, Paul Kendall, Tom Clary, Bob Lambert of Henderson, Kentucky, Hugo Taliaferro, and many others. At graduation, I received the prestigious Grayson Award and the John Allen Carter Award for military excellence.

The Class of '42 was unique; in that, it was a very close knit class with their roots being tied to McCallie. Although we all went to different colleges and universities, our roots came back to McCallie, since ours was the last class to graduate knowing we were destined to go into some service to fight in World War II. At our colleges or universities, we never had the time to feel the ties similar to what we had for McCallie. Therefore, our loyalty came back always to McCallie and to each other.

Naturally, during my senior year at McCallie, I began to think about going to college and wondering if Dad would be able to send me. Georgia Tech made me an offer to play football to punt for the Yellow Jackets, but I did not want to play collegiate football, feeling that I was not big enough to be an adequate player, plus I felt I needed to have a degree to be able to earn a living after the war was over. "Bud" Burns at McCallie understood my concerns and my feelings. About a month after our discussion, "Bud" called me into his office and told me that Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, had offered me a four year scholastic scholarship. I was overwhelmed, since this would relieve Dad of expense and I knew I had two uncles who had gone to W & L.

Also, Congressman B. Carroll Reece offered me an appointment to West Point, but after thinking it over, I declined with grateful thanks, since I felt the war would be over by the time I could be graduated from West Point, and I felt I wanted to be involved in the action before then.

Entering Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, in the fall, I got into the swing of things fairly fast. Initially, I roomed with Clifford Beasley from Birmingham, Alabama, and when we both pledged Phi Delta Theta fraternity, we moved into the fraternity house.

My semester at W & L during the fall of 1942 was one of intense study, coupled with good times on the weekends. Fortunately, my McCallie background enabled me to attain a good grade point average during that period. While there, the recruiters from the U. S. Army approached many of us about signing up for the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps (AERC), since we would be able to select our branch of service instead of waiting to be drafted and being thrown into some branch we might not prefer. With Dad and Mom's approval, I joined the AERC on November15, 1942. Obviously, I knew I would be called to active duty shortly, but I wanted my preferance of the Army Air Corps to be known.

Knowing the Christmas season in 1942 would be my last one as a civilian, I enjoyed being at home. After the holidays, I returned to W & L on Monday, January 4, 1943, to start classes for the new semester.

INDUCTION TO ACTIVE SERVICE

Private Walter Hanes Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
Company D - Roster 746
Camp New Cumberland, Pennsylvania
February 18, 1943

Having enlisted in the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps (AERC) on November 15, 1942, at Washington & Lee University, I received orders, dated February 5, 1943, on February 8, 1943, to report for induction in the U. S. Army at Camp New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, on February 18, 1943. My serial number, 13120365, had already been assigned when I enlisted in the AERC and would follow me throughout my time in service.

On the morning of Thursday, February 18, 1943, at 9:30AM, 133 of us from W & L left Lexington, Virginia, from McCrum's Drug Store parking lot by bus. After a long ride, we arrived at Camp New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, at 6:30PM. Immediately, we were given the oath and officially became privates in the U. S. Army, then we were assigned our company and issued toilet articles, towels, and blankets. Our basic uniforms were issued the next day with superficial medical physical examinations and immunization shots being given in both arms. Just ahead of me in the shot line, I remember Gene Griese of W & L passed out. All of our civilian clothes and belongings were packaged and shipped home on the afternoon of February 19, 1943. The following day, we were given an aptitude test, together with an interview. My interview was conducted by a captain from Canton, Ohio, and he told me he was assigning me to an Air Corps basic training center. On Sunday, the 21st, we had calisthenics and lectures; then on Monday, February 22, the sergeant woke fifteen of us at 5:30AM for kitchen duty (KP). Gene Marable from W & L and I washed pots and pans for seven hours then got shifted to fixing potatoes and firing the stoves for another five hours. At the end of the day, we were completely worn out. On the morning of Wednesday, February 24, a group of us were notified we were being shipped out to another base by noon, so after packing, we were put aboard a train, still wondering where we were heading. After the train pulled out, we were told we were heading for basic training for the Air Corps in St. Petersburg, Florida. For two nights and days, we rode that Pullman. I had been made "car commander" by a captain on board, meaning he wanted me to see the car was kept clean, that our car reported to meals on time, and that no roughhousing took place. Clancey Johnson from W & L and I shared a section together and we slept as best we could on the trip. We arrived at St. Petersburg at about 6:00AM on the

morning of February 26, 1943. The sergeant gave us a paper on which we could send collect telegrams to our homes. This was all well and good, except two days later on February 28, 1943, our address was changed again. We learned quickly not to act on the first set of instructions, as given a little time, the instructions would change again.

BASIC TRAINING

Pvt. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
Squadron 409 - 603rd Training Group
B. T. C. #6
St. Petersburg, Florida

Our "training" was pure basic in St. Petersburg: up at 5:10AM for cleaning our area and making up our bunks, the roll call, then breakfast thrown at us. A 6:40AM our day really started with drill until 10:30AM, followed by an hour and a half of calisthenics before lunch. After lunch, at 12:40PM we fall out again and drill until 3:30PM when again we have another hour and a half of calisthenics. Mail call came at 5:30PM. On March 1, we were given an additional pair of shoes, probably because our shoes were looking so worn.

On the first break I had, I got a haircut, cutting it less than one inch on the longest parts. It was comfortable, but it sure did look like the devil. At least, I could comb it with a wash rag.

While I was in St. Petersburg, my bunk was in the middle of the ballroom of the Vinoy Hotel which had been taken over by the army. There must have been at least 300 men with bunks in that area, so privacy was not known. The hotel was situated on the beach, but no one had time to swim, being too tired at the end of the day of training. The lighting in the ballroom was so dim that it was hard to read after sunset. On March 2, we ran an obstacle course along the beach in heavy sand near a small fishing village called Clearwater. It wasn't too bad, but it really tested what shape I was in. In the afternoon, we had processing interviews and I found I was to be sent to aerial armament school with the possibility of gunnery school after that, but my basic training had to be completed first.

On one of our drilling days, we watched an eagle with what seemed a 6-foot wing span dive for fish. It was a beautiful bird and certainly helped break the monotony of our daily routine. Sometime around the 10th of March, all the sirens in St. Petersburg blared at about 10:00PM and all lights went out. It was reported that an enemy submarine had been sighted in Tampa Bay and a few shells had been fired towards Tampa. That was the first and the last time we heard anything about this episode. Exactly what happened, we never knew!

On March 12, 1943, I received my orders to be shipped with others to Armament

School. As the result of these orders, we were confined to quarters. Since I had taken my dirty clothes to a laundry off the base, one of the fellows had to pick up my things for me. Also, I found by mail that Dad was having a rough time with kidney stones and was trying to find out what the doctors planned for him.

On March 14, 1943, several of us boarded what looked like a Spanish American War wooden daycoach for a five-day trip to what ended at Armament School at Buckley Field in Denver, Colorado. We knew we were heading west, but our destination was unknown until we arrived there. The trip was most boring and lengthy. The only clothes I had were summer sun tans. The train was hot at the start and the only cooling was from the open windows. Food was served in shifts by cars, so the conductor would let us know each night when our car was scheduled to eat the following day. It seemed our car was switched almost daily to a siding where we would sit at time for hours before the train would be hitched onto another engine going our way. I never knew what route our car followed, but a trip from St. Petesburg to Denver should have been a lot shorter than five days. Sleeping during this trip was a real chore! All of us quickly learned that the backs of the seats could be pulled off and laid flat, using our musset bags as a pillow. Men slept in positions never seen before or since!

Late in the afternoon of March 19, 1943, we arrived in Denver, Colorado, with a greeting of ten inches of snow on the ground, plus the fact that we all wore suntans and had no winter clothes. Buses took those of us scheduled for Armament School to Buckley Field, outside of Denver. On arrival, I was given orders promoting me to Private First Class (PFC).

ARMAMENT SCHOOL

Pfc. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
766 TSS - Barracks C503
Buckley Field, Denver, Colorado

On the late afternoon of March 19, 1943, I arrived by truck from the train at Buckley Field, which was located about ten miles outside of Denver, Colorado. I, with the other new arrivals, were immediately issued blankets and a complete set of winter uniforms. After the assignment to barracks, we were taken to the mess hall for dinner. Buckley Field seemed to have been constructed rather hurriedly, as all the buildings were one story with gravel streets, which oozed mud through the rock, especially during wet periods. Due to the conditions of the area, we all were issued rubber galoshes to wear over our high top shoes. Although there

were wooden sidewalks, it was almost impossible not to have mud on our shoes and spattered on our trouser legs.

Cleaning our barracks, C503, was almost constant, since the floor needed mopping at every opportunity to clear the mud or dust; but even so, the wooden floors would stain from the mud. To try to keep the flooring planks bright, we used Clorox in the mop water since there was a large bottle kept in the latrine and shower area. This treatment worked fairly well and prevented our barracks from being censured by the inspecting officers. Of course, when we were out of the building, we kept the windows open to get the smell out.

On Sunday, March 21, 1943, our schooling in armament started with lectures and splitting into classes. Instead of starting classes, our class group was given a week of KP which seemed to be the "army way" of indoctrination to any base move. After feeding the entire cadre at Buckley Field for twelve hours a day for a week, our classes in armament got underway on Monday, March 19, 1943.

During the three weeks I spent at Buckley, I was in class for eight hours a day, Monday through Saturday, with Sundays off. After the eight hours in class, I still had homework daily, preparing for the following day. I also had calisthenics to attend each day, except Sundays. The times in class shifted each week for the three weeks. The first week was scheduled from 7:00AM to 3:00PM; the second week was from 3:00PM to 11:00PM; and the final week ran from 11:00PM to 7:00AM. Keeping my biological clock in sync was a fight!

During this period, our intensified instruction was focused on the weapons used primarily in aerial combat by the Army Air Corps. On-hands assembly and disassembly of weapons and the nomenclature of each was pounded into us with the instructors timing us with a stopwatch as to how long either the assembly or disassembly took. Fortunately, I had the benefit of prior use and knowlege of guns, which enabled me to score well in the timing and the recognition of the parts. Not only was our instruction concerned with the .30 caliber and the .50 caliber aerial machine guns, but we learned the use and workings of the 20mm cannon and the 37mm cannon. Since flying personnel normally carried a sidearm of the .45 caliber Colt automatic pistol, we learned this weapon thoroughly. Also, Air Corps ground personnel were normally equipped the .30 caliber carbine and occasionally the .45 caliber Thompson submachine gun, so we became familar with these weapons. During our period of studies, we were taken to the firing range where we fired each of the weapons we individually had assembled. Near the end of the period, each of us had to qualify in the use of the .45 caliber

Colt pistol. I was able to qualify on each on the first try which gave me some time off while others had to try qualification again.

It seemed that every minute of the day was taken up with some requirement. At the end of our shift at 7:00AM on April 19, 1943, we were notified that we would move to Lowry Field that afternoon for the balance of our armament training.

ARMAMENT SCHOOL

Pfc. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
33 T. S. S.
Lowry Field, Colorado

On Monday, April 19, 1943, after finishing our armament class shift at 7:00AM, we received our orders to pack up to move the eight miles to Lowry Field. Immediately after lunch, those of us on the orders climbed in trucks and traveled to Lowry Field where we obtained our barracks assignments, together with orders to report for KP duty the next day for a week. This was the same procedure that hit us on arrival at Buckley. Apparently to soothe all the gripes somewhat, everyone was given Class A passes which enabled each of us to leave the base when we weren't scheduled for duty.

On Tuesday, April 20, I spent thirteen hours on KP and a few of us in the group peeled 6,400 pounds of potatoes, 1,800 pounds of onions, and 2,300 pounds of carrots. That was hard to believe! On Wednesday, it was the same old story, except I was on duty for fourteen and a half hours. All of our bunch were ready for the "sack" when we finally got off duty. On Thursday, by some stroke of luck, I was one of a few who didn't have to report for KP duty. That day allowed me to catch up on some sleep and to take a walk around the base just to get the "lay of the land". Friday and Saturday called for the same duty, but on Saturday I started having a jabbing pain in the lower right side of my belly. After reporting for KP duty Saturday morning, the 24th, my gut was giving me a fit, so the lieutenant in charge sent me to the hospital to be checked. The doctor punched around, had xrays taken, then threw me into a hospital bed. My lower right side was packed in ice, and I thought I'd freeze! It was a poor way to spend Easter on the 25th with an enema and milk of magnesia. The ice packing treatment continued on April 26, which made a lousy way to spend my 19th birthday.

Also, on Easter there was a soldier brought in with a sprained ankle. A couple of hours

after he was checked in, he started having convulsions and died. This was a compete surprise to everyone, including the doctor taking care of him. I thought it certainly was not a pleasant day for his parents nor those of us there with him. I asked the doctor the next day as to what the cause of the soldier's death was, and he replied they hadn't determined what happened to him. Later in checking, they said the soldier died of heart failure.

I was kept in the hospital with ice on me, plus some pills they gave me, until Wednesday, April 28, before I was allowed to go back to duty. On release, I asked the doctor, a major, what had hit me. He said I either had an appendix acting up or a "nervous colon", whatever that was.

Due to my being in the hospital, I missed starting classes with my group on Tuesday, the 27th. This set me back to start with the next class on Tuesday, May 4. Fortunately, although I lost my bunk in the barracks, I was assigned another one in a small room with only six of us, one of whom was bay chief and a staff sergeant from Rhode Island. The six of us certainly enjoyed having that room separated from the main open space. During the days before I could start classes, I was assigned to the orderly room for duty and was able to use my typing skills there, plus running errands for the captain.

While I worked in the orderly room, I received a letter from Cliff Beasley, my roommate at W & L, saying that he was in the hospital at Fort Siebert, Alabama, with a broken hand. From what he said, another soldier fell on it during an infantry exercise. Cliff also said he felt his oufit would be heading overseas, probably to Europe, before too long. Even though Cliff was very nearsighted and wore thick glasses, he was an excellent shot.

On May 4, I started the continuation of my armament classes. Our study and our hands-on work was an extension of our studies at Buckley, but the details were more exacting and we worked on different types of bombs, shackles, and fuses. On Saturday, May 8, a test was given to our group. It was more of a general intelligance test than one on our armament studies. On Monday, the 10th, I was told that I was one of three men to score the highest on the test. On Tuesday, May 11, the three of us were sent to base headquarters and appeared before a board of officers which interviewed us individually. Although we hadn't formally finished our armament courses, we were told we were considered as having received our diplomas if we get shipped out prior to graduation, which was due on June 12.

On Tuesday, May 18, Matt Cullen and I were called to report to General Sneed's

headquarters for interviews with the General and his adjutant. We arrived, as instructed, at 9:00AM, and had pleasant interviews. I personally found General Sneed to be very easy to talk with and I felt he had a warm personality. Frankly, prior to the interview, I was tight as a drum, knowing I would be talking with the general who was the U. S. Army commander in Hawaii when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941, and who had been roundly criticized, unjustly I felt, for not being aware of the pending attack. After the interviews were completed, Matt and I were asked to wait in another room. After about twenty minutes, we were recalled into General Sneed's office and told we were being sent to Yale University for a six weeks course, at the completion of which we would be commissioned second lieutenant armament officers. We were instructed to pack all our gear and bring it with us to that office at 10:00AM on May 26 to pick up our orders and travel vouchers to go by train that afternoon to Yale University. Matt and I left feeling like we were walking on clouds!

On May 26, having told all our friends, "so long", Matt and I carried our barracks bags to the general's office at 10:00AM, as instructed. As we entered the office, the sergeant major seemed to be very busy on some project with an officer, so we sat down to wait for our orders. After about an hour, the sergeant major looked up and asked, "You're Cullen and Lancaster, aren't you?" We replied that we were there to pick up our orders and travel vouchers for Yale. The sergeant major looked embarassed and explained that a message had been received that morning from Yale that their classes were all full and they would be unable to accept us, so we were to report back to our squadron and continue our classes. He was most apologetic, but there was nothing that could be done.

Of course, both of us left the office dejected and mad. As we walked back across the parade ground with our heads down, I spotted a reflection off the sun from something in the dirt. I picked it up and it was an Indian head penny. When I looked at the penny, I told Matt that I'd always heard it was a good luck omen to find money, but that day had really played hell with that axiom. Reporting back to our orderly room, our captain was as surprised as we were and expressed his disbefief and condolences. He apologized for the workings of the army and welcomed us back into our usual routine. As a sideline, prior to our selection, Matt Cullen, who was a graduate of McDill University in Toronto, Canada, had applied and taken the examination for West Point. Shortly, he received his acceptance and left for the academy.

On May 29, our armament class finished the mechanics of the Sperry turrets and gun sights used on the B-17 and B-24 bombers. On Sunday, the 30th, I had an off day and Collier Wenderoth, who was in another squardon, came by with the 1943 W & L yearbook, the Calyx,

which had been received by Bill Gates from W & L and who was in the photographic unit on the base.

On Monday, May 31, there was a notice on the bulletin board of a meeting for those men who might be interested in applying for a new school concerning a completely new type of aerial gunnery system. Since I had some free time, I went to the meeting which gave very little specific information but did tell us that we would be taught and shown a new system to be installed on the new bomber, the B-29. It sounded interesting so I applied for the school, having found out that there was no room at this time in a gunnery school and our class of amorers would become ground personnel. I felt this would give me the opportunity to fly if accepted. The school was to last for four months and the B-29 groups would be formed in the fall of the year.

On June 5, we finished our armament classes and left on Monday, June 7, on field maneuvers for a week about fifteen miles from Denver in the desert. We were issued cartridge belts, canteens, knap sacks, and one-half of a 2-man tent. Our class was the first one to be sent on this exercise, so our group was to set up the camp for future classes. Much of the area in which we were dropped was covered by honeysuckle with nests of rattlesnakes all around the selected position. Someone with knowlege of snakes found some nests of bull snakes which kill rattlers but aren't harmful to people. I got hold of a 5-foot bull snake and it slept in the tent under my blanket where it was warm, but it would wake me at night moving around. Our bunch killed about two dozen of the rattlers and turned the bull snakes we found loose in the area. Our section built a 6' X 12' bomb dump below ground, supported by logs we cut from trees in the area. For six hours, Alvin Carter and I swung an ax for the logs, while the other twenty-eight men were digging the 12' deep hole for the bomb storage. Only six men could work at a time since the width was so narrow. We had to use the logs to brace the sides from collapsing. In the late afternoon, we were given calisthenics, which was asolutely unnecessary since we'd been working hard all day. During the week, we had a flight of P-40s make low level dives at us to simulate our being strafed. We scattered and hit the ground on each pass, resulting in all of us having to pull cactus needles out of our skin. On June 11, we were on KP to clean all the pots and pans with sand, and we were trucked back to Lowry Field. On the morning of June 12, we fell out for graduation and our diplomas were presented. I never did figure out why we received a diploma as our records would indicate that we had finished the armament course.

With our graduation from armament school, the lists came out indicating those who had

been selected to go to the new Central Fire Control (CFC) school, for which I had applied. Since the CFC school would not start until Monday, June 21, as had been the usual case, we who had been accepted for the school were placed on KP for the next week, while the others from the armament school were required to attend additional classes until they were shipped out to a unit in need of ground personnel. Those of us for CFC were moved into a new barracks area on Saturday, June 19, 1943.

CENTRAL FIRE CONTROL SCHOOL

Pfc. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
20 T. S. S.
Lowry Field, Colorado

Monday, June 21, 1943, was the first day of Central Fire Control (CFC) school. Classes were divided into three sections of eight hours each for five days a week, and the complete course would last approximately four months, we were told. Our instructors were all civilians from the General Electric Company which had developed and manufactured the unique turret and gunnery system to be taught us during the following months. Our instructor was Andy Anderson of G.E., a very pleasant person but a tough teacher. He had a graduate degree from Georgia Tech in electrical engineering.

An indication of how secretive our training was to be was demonstrated by the fact that the entire group of buildings where our classes were held were surrounded by fences with barbed wire and all entrances into the area were manned by armed guards. Each of us had a special pass to be cleared for admittance to the area which was posted as "Restricted".

Further, at our first class meeting, each of us were required to sign a statement that we would not divulge any of the information to anyone verbally or in writing. We were even cautioned against discussing our studies or work among ourselves, except within the confines of our restricted area. Any infraction of these policies would result in a general court marshall, dismissal from the school, and a possible jail sentence with a dishonorable discharge from the service. In other words, we were told to keep our mouths shut! It was stressed that our work was given an A-1 priority over any defense work and manufacture. Also, our equipment needs were available immediately, based on that priority, since it was up to us in the first CFC class to set up the entire program for those to follow.

During this first lecture session, a lieutenant colonel talked with us about our future. He said several generals had recommended that on the completion of this CFC course at least 50% of the graduates should be commissioned. He further said there was one general in Washington holding up the status of the recommendation. That was the last we ever heard of that possibility of a commission!

Our classes were intense and required extra study time. The theory of electricity was thorough and I felt I would have a degree in electrical engineering if I passed this part. We studied electric motors and their uses in connection with the new type of turrets installed on the new B-29s currently getting into production.

On July 1, I had a day of rest and slept to almost 11:00AM. It gave me a chance to get to the PX (post exchange) to pick up needed toilet articles and to review some of the material we had been studying. When I checked the bulletin board, I found that General Sneed had changed our class schedule so our section would be in class from 6:45PM to 1:45AM, starting July 2. Someone in the orderly room said the general felt the change would enable us to get more sleep, but I felt he overlooked the fact that other soldiers would be taking their calisthenics at 8:00AM right outside our window. We found we were lucky to pick up five hours of sleep.

I did have time on July 1 to get in touch with Neil Tasher who was law student at W & L and was working in an attorney's office there in Denver, his home. He was a civilian due to a mastoid operation he had which continued to drain, eliminating him from service. Mrs. Tasher, his mother, asked me to come to spend the night with them when the opportunity presented itself. Later on, I was able to accept that invitation, since we were given more time away from our classes and we also were given Class A passes. On this evening, "Tash" got me a date with a girl named Joan Malone and he had a date with his girl, Shirley Godfrey. We had a great time and made me forget all the military life for a short time.

A bunch of us went to church on the base on Sunday, July 4, and the chaplin's sermon was most interesting. It was a topic well chosen for military men, so our attention was on the subject continually. After church, three of us grabbed some lunch at the PX and went to the movie, "Stage Door Canteen", which was light but enjoyable.

For the next four days, our classwork consisted of intense study of the dynamotors, amplidyne generators, servo-amplifiers, and selsyns which were designed to control the turret

motors in connection with the gunnery sights in the entire CFC system on the B-29. Even in this short time of class work, my hand-written notes were mounting in numbers of pages.

With a day off on Thursday, July 8, Tash and I got together for dinner, then picked up Joan and Shirley. We drove about forty miles up in the mountains outside of Denver to Evergreen Park for a party. Shirley's family had a cabin there. There were eight couples at the party which was chaperoned by Mrs. Personnette. Joan had insisted on taking her car on the trip and it was identical to the one I had, a 1941 Ford convertible, so I enjoyed driving again. Getting to the cabin so late, the party broke up well after midnight, so I spent the rest of the night asleep at Tash's home. I reported back to base by noon, since I was scheduled for calisthenics at 1400 hours. The bed at Tash's house rested me so much that I felt like a new man during calisthenics in spite of getting to bed so late.

The classwork was getting rougher and testing our ability to understand and apply the intricacies and complex controls of the B-29 turrets with electrical power changes. So far, I had been able to stay within the top 10% of our class on our tests. With our change of schedule, it practically eliminated our chance to attend a church service on Sundays, much to our regret.

Within the week, I had letters from old McCallie friends. I found out Jim Ballard was at Annapolis at the Naval Academy, Bob Lambert was in the Marine navigation school in San Diego, and Paul Kendall was at Smyrna, Tennessee, flying B-24s. Paul said he and Peggy Sullivan might get married in about five months.

On Monday night, July 12, Andy Anderson, our G.E. civilian instructor, told our section there was a high probability that seven of us would be kept there at Lowry as instructors after we graduated and he was looking directly at me as he said that. After the close of class, I talked with him, asking that he do everything possible to prevent my having to instruct, since I had my heart set on flying. He did say he would try to help, but he said I was most likely to be asked to stay, because all my test grades were so high and I had an analytical aptitude, plus I had the ability to help others, he noticed.

On the next day, July 19, the movie star, Jane Wyman was at our service club on the base. My reaction was she had a beautiful face but "she's built like a rail, no curves whatsoever!" All of us liked meeting her, as she was so easy to talk to.

Classes got harder as the days went on. In addition to classes, we started building a scale model of the complete gunnery system of the B-29. The frame was set up with 4' X 4' pieces of lumber with planking at different levels so we could have access to all units. The turrets and the sights were spaced identical as they were on the plane. We used the same cabling, wiring, and switches that were being installed in the B-29, so we would be familiar with the locations. Serveral of us worked on this training mockup even on our time off. Herb Rutter and I had first suggested this and the officers responsible for the project approved the idea.

Thursday, July 29, Tash picked me up and we drove to Broadmoor, an amusement park just outside of town. Tash had a date with Shirley Godfry and I had one with Barbara Bromfield, the AAU diving champion. We danced until about 11:00PM and had a great time. The band even played the "Washington & Lee Swing for us.

On Monday, August 2, I got a letter from Jane Crews telling me about our mutual friends. In her letter, she mentioned that Bill Eerdmans from McCallie was killed in North Africa, but later I found that was not true. Where she got her information, I never knew!

On Friday, August 13, for some reason our class of 12 men were moved back to 33 T.S.S. from 20 T.S.S., just across the street. We were put back into the same barracks we were in when I had just gotten out of the hospital. The place was wreck and dirty as the devil, so we had to wash the whole place down. In the small room where I was before, the ceiling still had the hole where Abe Stein had planted his foot from his top bunk.

In classes, we started getting tests every night and at the end of each week we had tests on everything covered during that week. Fortunately, the results of those test grades we received back on August 14 gave me a 94 and a 100. Several of our men worried about being kicked out of the program due to their grades. Testing continued in class all through August. We had one complete phase test on everything we had covered in the entire course and the highest grade was an 84, and I had an 83. In review, all my errors were due to carelessness. With the lesson I learned of losing points due to carelessness, I became determined not to let that happen again. On the testing of August 27, I made 100!

On Sunday, August 29, we had our phase testing and I made a 90, the highest grade in the class. My average was holding above 90, so I felt pretty good. In our evening classes on August 30, we started the trouble shooting phase on the mockup of the gunnery system we had had built. In this phase, our instructor would insert malfunctions into the system, causing erratic

behavior, and it was up to us to locate and repair the problem. This was the most interesting part of our schooling, putting together all of our knowlege on the system.

Tuesday, September 1, was our day off, so Jim "Muscles" Hoffman and I went into Denver with only $2.00 apiece in our pockets. We spent two hours in the museum, picked up a sandwich, then came back to base. I had exactly 2¢ left in my pockets, but we had enjoyed the day, plus proving to ourselves that we could have a good time and still be broke.

On Friday, September 4, our class was taken out to the flight line at Lowry Field. We were able to review the newest B-24 series of bombers and to go through the plane completely. Besides the B-24, we visited a B-17, B-18, B-25, B-26, P-38, P-51, A-20, P-39, AT-11, and an AT-6. One of the B-18s had a Nazi submarine to its credit. All the bombers had turrets but they were operated by hydraulics, not by electric motors as we had studied for the B-29.

With the work and practice on the mockup of the sytem, we all felt we were making real progress in our field of study. Our instructor said we were really ahead of where we were scheduled to be, so we were able to spend more time on malfunctions on the mockup. That suited us fine. When working out problems, I felt I was putting to use all of my knowlege in a practical way. To me, solving the malfunctions was a great deal of fun.

On September 25, with only two weeks to the completion of our CFC course, we were told we would be shipped out to a staging area for the formation of B-29 crews within the state of Kansas, not Marietta, Georgia, as we had thought. That was all we were told and were given no details as to when or where in Kansas we'd be going.

On Sunday, September 26, we were given a final test covering the entire material we'd studied for the past four months in the CFC school. My results were great, scoring a 97, which surprised me. The instructor said the list would be posted showing me in the top 1% of the class, but he wanted me to know privately that I finished the top man in the school. It was nice of him to let me know that, as it made me feel I'd accomplished something.

With only a week to go before graduation, I helped instruct some of the classes following ours. I had written a long list on the CFC system, indicating what to look for if certain malfunctions occurred. Everyone wanted a copy of those sheets, and Andy Anderson, our G.E. representative, was so impressed by the list that he borrowed my sheets to have them printed for the use by the following classes' use. Andy was most complimentary of my participation

throughout the course and I appreciated the comments, coming from him.

On Saturday, October 9, 1943, our class received our diplomas from the Central Fire Control school after sixteen weeks of intensive study on the theory, repair, and maintenance of the new B-29 unique gunnery system. It was a glorious day!

Since it was late in the day on the 9th, Tash picked me up and we had dinner together. He bought me back to base early in the evening, since I had packing to do and there were books that I had to have checked in by the morning of the 10th. On the afternoon of the 10th, our orders were posted showing that our class of CFC graduates were scheduled to be shipped to Salina, Kansas, by rail on October 12. With no duty for me, I was ready to leave the base. I was picked up in late afternoon by Muriel "Penny" Schmidt, whom Tash had introduced me to about six weeks previously and whom I had dated often. After dinner, we went to a movie in town before she dropped me off at the base gate. Penny was a short redhead and very cute, plus being fun to be with. She was working in Denver for AT&T as a teletype operator, living with her aunt. Her home was San Francisco where her father was vice president of Republic Steel Corporation.

A party for our graduation class was held on October 11 at Cresthaven, a hotel a little way out of Denver. Penny and I went to the party with Harold Rushford and his date. The party was a fine event with a band and a full buffet for dinner. Capt. Vines and Lt. Brown and their wives attended; and since they were also having such a good time , Capt. Vines called the base and told the O.D. not to take bed check on our group and to let the men come in at any time. Originally, we were to have been back at base by 1:00AM, but this action by the captain cancelled that. Rush and I were dropped off at about 3:00AM the morning of the 12th, while some didn't get in until it was time to get up. The O.D. woke us up at 6:00AM in time for a quick breakfast before cleaning the barracks and reporting to the usual calisthenics. Thinking we'd have time for a nap we needed, we found we had to prepare for a quartermaster check of our clothing before we could clear the base to be shipped out.

When I got back to the barracks, S/Sgt. Harry Benson was waiting to see me. He told me he and three other non-commissioned men were being commissioned to set up a teaching system to instruct B-29 flying personnel, who were unfamiliar with the B-29, on the use of the CFC gunnery system prior to going into combat. He said he was to pick someone he wanted to work with for this project and he wanted me to join him and be commissioned. He said he knew I was on orders to go to Salina and he wouldn't ask for an answer right then, but for me to think

about it and let him know when I got to Salina. I told him I appreciated the compliment of his asking me, but I wanted to be in the B-29 flying. However, I said I would give it good thought and would let him know as soon as I got to Salina. At 7:00PM, we boarded a Pullman headed for Kansas. After the party the previous night we quickly hit the sack and slept hard on the train!

FORMATION OF B-29 CREWS

Pfc. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
58th Bomb Wing Development Detachment (Heavy)
Smoky Hill AAF
Salina, Kansas
October 13, 1943

Our train from Denver pulled into Salina, Kansas, at about 3:00AM, on Wednesday, October 13, 1943, but we were allowed to sleep until 6:00AM before unloading. We were taken directly to a meeting where we were told we would be at Smoky Hill Army Air Field for about two weeks being processed for placement on flying crews or ground units at one of the four B-29 fields in Kansas. There would be one bomber group at each of the four fields. The 468th Bomb Group was at Smoky Hill at Salina, the 462nd Bomb Group was at Walker AAF at Victoria, the 444th Bomb Group was at Great Bend, and the 40th Bomb Group was at Pratt. The major addressing us explained that flight crews of the B-29 were to be primarily made up as an elite group with each crew member being a specialist on some part of the B-29. The pilots and copilots were either combat veterans or those with much multiengine experience. The navigators and bombardiers were to be able to interchange positions, while the engineers must know the engines both mechanically and by operational performance. The radio men was to be able to operate and repair all the radio equipment in the plane. The radar men had to be able to repair and to operate the radar equipment , cooperating with the navigator at all times. The right gunner was also an engine specialist, while the left gunner was an electrical specialist. The tail gunner was also a sheet metal specialist. The senior gunner, my position on the top of the plane, was not only a gunner but was a specialist in armament and the central fire control operation and repair. The senior gunner was the only one on the crew who had a triple MOS. We were told at the meeting that we were part of the 2nd Army Air Corps under the command of General "Hap" Arnold in Washington.

As his closing remarks, the major reminded us that we had each signed a statement not

to divulge anything about our work or the aircraft.

As we left the meeting, there was a B-29 flying at about 10,000 feet over the field and it was being trailed by a B-17, which looked like a Piper Cub. The contrast between the size of the two planes was certainly noticeable! It was explained to us that the production of the B-29s was behind schedule, so none of the four fields had received more than one plane to date.

Since the processing for crew assignments was running so slowly, there was very little for us to do, so we were given calisthenics in the morning and drilled for two hours in the afternoon. Apparently not knowing what to do with us, we were given class A passes, enabling us to go into Salina just to look around. One walk around in Salina was enough to hold me on the base for the rest of my stay there.

As I had noted previously, I wrote S/Sgt. Harry Benson at Lowry, turning down the opportunity of working with him on his project, explaining to him that I wanted to fly in the B-29 as a crew member. I again expressed my appreciation for being considered for the position, even with the possibility of receiving a commission.

While we continued our waiting for our processing to start, the sergeant headed towards our barracks looking for men to be put on KP. I had seen him coming our way, so I told Harold Rushford what I suspected, so we both rolled under our bunks. The sergeant selected ten other men, not seeing us. After their duty, the ones who got caught raised hell with us for not warning them.

On Monday, October 25, our group of CFC men started the processing procedure with interviews before the officers processing us. We were told that we would be notified as to which crews we were assigned to on the next day, the 26th. The officer said all other membrs of the crews had been assigned, so our assignments would complete the lists for crew personnel. No notice was posted on the 26th, but on the morning of October 27, the bulletin board had lists posted of all assigned crews, noting their group number, squadron number, and the crew positions of all eleven men on each crew.

I was assigned to a crew going to Walker Army Air Field, Victoria, Kansas, as part of the 462nd Bomb Group (H), 768th Squadron. Our crew's pilot and airplane commander was Lt. Ralph L. Steen. Instructions were also given for us to assemble in the main hanger with signs giving the airplane commanders' names for each crew. I am sure most of the officers had met

each other in their quarters, but the enlisted men had no idea as to who would end up on crews together.

Our pilot and airplane commander was First Lieutenant Ralph L. Steen who had recently been instructing in B-24s since the completion of his 4-engine training. His home was in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and he had graduated from the University of Oklahoma in Norman and was commissioned through his ROTC at the university in the artillery, but he applied and was accepted for the air corps pilot training from which he graduated. Ralph was an excellent pilot, but often he was rather aloof with anyone who had not graduated from a university and was not commissioned. Seldom did Ralph appear on the line and mingle with the enlisted men during the period I was with him, even though we got along well. I felt he trusted me in my job on the crew at all times. He loved his bourbon and his beer but he was cold sober when he was flying on missions, but after a mission his sobriety could be a different story.

Our copilot was Lt. Arthur R. Lehwalder from Seattle, Washington, and originally from Montana. He wasn't at Salina for the original crew origination, since he was in the process of getting married to his wonderful wife, Polly. He joined us at Walker Field. All the crew members found him easy to talk with and fair on any disputes. "Lee" and I became close friends, I felt, though there was quite a difference in rank. I always appreciated the fact that he never "pulled rank" on me, although I am certain there were times when it would have been justified. "Lee" was one of those people I always had the feeling I could trust my life with.

The bombardier was Wilfred J. Thomas of Canastotas, New York. We called him "Tommy". He was a short, fiesty redhead who taught school prior to joining the service. At times he could become excitable, but he always was willing to jump into any situation to protect the crew in any action. His bombing was good and any misses were usually due to circumstances over which he had no control. While in the States, "Tommy" had his wife, Janie, with him, and she was a real "jewel" and fun to be with.

The navigator, when we formed crews, was Lt. Charles F. Weaver of Houston, Texas. He was a rather quiet type of fellow and almost from the start the crew had reservations about his ability to hit his tail with both hands, but he had the job. We enlisted men felt he seemed nervous about being in his position, although he seemingly was a nice guy.

The flight engineer was M/Sgt. Thomas J. O'Malley from Syracuse, New York. He was regular army, having been in the army for about ten years and had served most of his time in

Panama. Being regular army, he had the problem of having no imagination and "lived by the book", the technical manuals. He personified the regular army member of whom we civilian soldiers said "There was a right way and there was the army way". O'Malley was promoted shortly to Flight Officer, which was the same as a Warrant Officer in the army, meaning the grade was between an enlisted man and an officer. It was noted fairly shortly that he knew very little about the B-29 engines. His demeanor was such that it showed he cared little for anyone who was not "regular army". Most of us enlisted men had frequent conflicts with him.

Our radio man was Norman H. Schroen from East St. Louis, Illinois, one of the roughest cities in the country, a steel mills city. Later in our training, he picked up the nickname "Dixie" on a trip to Birmingham, but that's another story. He was a tall fellow and had extremely long arms, plus being strong as a bull. His ethnic origin was Lithuanian and he was swarthy. He had a gentle touch on his radio key and was a quiet fellow. If he liked a person, he would do anything for him; conversely if he didn't care for someone, his manner was obvious. Fortunately, he and I became good friends.

Our radar man at the formation of our crew in Salina was Lt. Harold B. Vicory of Greenleaf, Kansas. He was very shy and bashful but very intelligent. He had been raised by two old maid aunts and was rather naive. From all indications, he knew his job well but didn't mingle with the crew much, spending his spare time reading.

Probably the most immoral man I ever met was our tail gunner and sheet metal specialist, Dayton B. Green. His hometown was listed as San Francisco, but said he was from Denver. He had been in the army since the war started, having been in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) since 1938 and in 1941 the CCC was taken into the army. He never spent any of his off duty time with other crew members and was considered a "loner". Since he had been in the army so much longer than the rest of us, he felt we knew nothing. All he had on his mind was trying to prevent working and finding a woman to sleep with.

James B. "J. B." Mackinaw was our left gunner and electrical specialist and the oldest man on the crew. He was from Birmingham, Alabama, where he owned three gas service stations. He was a redheaded, rosy complexioned Scotsman, who was a confirmed bachelor. He was one great fellow to be with and to work with, and I counted him as a good friend, who was killed too early in January, 1945.

Another of my close crew friends was Ross E. Briner, our right gunner and engine

specialist. He was originally from a farm outside of North Manchester, Indiana, and knew more about the mechanics of the R-3350 B-29 engines than most of the engineers in the group. He and his wife, Mary Louise, had married at eighteen and she joined him after he found a room for them in Hays, Kansas. All through our association in our crew, in combat and out, I knew I could depend on Ross to do his job well, and more. He was just "rock solid" in all his dealings and work. Particularly overseas, Ross and I spent a great amount of time together and enjoyed each others' company no matter where we were. We remained closely in touch with each other after our service period and until his death.

I, as senior gunner and armament and CFC specialist, made up the eleventh man on the crew. When we started flying, my position was at the gunnery ring sight on top of the B-29, controlling primarily the two upper turrets. It was the greatest seat on the plane for visibility and being able to take in the whole scene during any operation. Every flight was a new view of the world around me. I was the youngest man on the crew and everyone called me "Lank".

CREW TRAINING & THE BATTLE OF KANSAS

Pfc. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
462nd Bomb Group (Very Heavy)
768th Bomb Squadron
Walker Army Air Field
Victoria, Kansas
October 28, 1943

On Thursday morning, October 28, 1943, we loaded into buses and left Salina for Walker Army Air Field at Victoria, Kansas, a trip of about 75 miles due west of Salina. Victoria was about midway between Hays and Russell cities. On arrival, we enlisted men were assigned barracks as a crew and we were given our bedding and blankets. The officers, of course, were assigned to another area. Our barracks were long, one story buildings, with a double door at the entrance and the latrine and showers at the rear. There were two rows of double decker bunks on each side. I noted that our heat would be coming from four potbellied stoves, so I grabbed a lower bunk midway between the first and second stoves with a window beside it. I wanted to make certain I wouldn't get too hot during the cold nights during the winter when the stoves would be blazing hot. There was no way I could sleep in a hot room, I knew. The rest of our crew's enlisted men gathered around the same area as I did.

Friday, October 29, 1943, was my first day of work on the flight line in the squadron. Our 768th Squadron was one of four on the field, which was home to the 462nd Bomb Group. The other squadrons were the 769th, the 770th, and the 771st. The entire, and only, B-29 groups were all situated on four fields in Kansas, as noted. There was only one B-29 on our field, and it was in the hanger most of the time, having some malfunction repaired or modification made. I was issued my leather, fur-lined flying suit with fur-lined boots, gloves, and oxygen mask, as shortly our flying training would start on B-17s, due to the shortage of B-29s.

In view of the fact that none of us had received furloughs since coming into service and our work was progressing so slowly, I applied for a furlough but few were being given out. I was told there might be a chance of getting one in December but I was not to count on it due to the priority push being made to get the B-29 off the production lines and onto the fields.

On that first day on the line, I certainly felt like a "rookie", since so many of the men had been in the army longer than I and many had already had overseas tours of duty. I will say most of the men were very helpful to me in getting the lay of the land. No matter the rank or length of service, everyone was enthusiastic about being in the initial B-29 group and were looking forward to being sent overseas when we could get enough planes for the proper training in the new bird. Even the ground personnel were frustrated that they were getting no experience in working on the B-29 due to planes just not coming off the production lines at the factories to be sent to the fields.

On Monday, November 1, F/Sgt. Blasko came to ask me to straighten out the CFC system on the B-29 we had on the field. As it turned out, some major had been monkeying around with the system without having any knowlege of what he was doing. There was a certain sequence and procedure to be followed in initially putting the system into operation, and he had not followed it out of ignorance. It was cold as the devil out on the line, but I took the time to explain to him what had to be done. This wasn't the only time I was called out to straighten out the system, but most of the time some uninformed ground person was trying to play with the system. Finally, after we CFC men had bitched enough, orders were posted telling all personnel not to touch any of the system without a CFC man being there. Also, on this same day there was an order on the board, stating that the 58 Bomb Wing (Heavy) was then to be designated as the 58th Bomb Wing (Very Heavy). Someone made the comment that we didn't have enough B-29s yet to become "very" heavy!

Also, on November 1, I and the rest of the crew were officially put on flying status. This

meant we would be entitled to flying pay if we flew four hours a month. In monetary terms, that meant I would be paid $27.00 additional monthly. Those of us CFC men had more actual training on B-29 equipment than most other men, but we were still privates first class, while the men who went to other schools in mechanics, electrical, radio, and radar all received promotions when they finished their courses. I bore them no ill feelings, but I certainly felt, as the other CFC men did, that we had been short changed.

In November, our crew flew three times. Our first flight was in a B-17F which had returned from Europe and it was a "bag of bolts". The sheet metal on the right wing, where it joined the fuselage, had lost its rivets and someone had threaded safety wire through the rivet holes to keep the sheet metal from flapping. When we asked about it, the ground people said that there was such a rush for training that the plane couldn't be taken out of service long enough to make the repair. We flew for 3:40 hours on the 14th and on the 16th we flew for 4:30 hours in the B-29, performing five landings and takeoffs giving Steen and Lehwalder good training time. On the 19th, in the B-17F we spent 4:30 hours doing practice bombing and getting used to high altitude at 25,000 feet by flying from our base to Denver and back. It gave Weaver a chance to practice and chart his navigation. Our total flying time for November was 12:40 hours.

In our barracks there was of course other crew members. Oddly, two of the CFC men were Jack Kelly and Henry Horner. These two had been at New Cumberland for induction with me. We had three had gone through armament school and on to CFC school together, then we ended up together in the same squadron at WAAF in the same barracks. Jack's home was in Brookline, Massachusetts, and prior to being called to service he was in school at the University of Massachusetts. Henry was from Pennsylvania. He was smart as a whip and a nice fellow but he didn't seem to have any mechanical appitude or coordination. As pleasant as he was, none of us in CFC school wanted to work with him, since he never seemed to know what was going on and our time had to be taken explaining the studies to him. Prior to going into service, Henry was a junior at Penn State, pursuing a degree in chemical engineering.

On Saturday, November 13, I was told our furloughs were to be approved, so I wired Dad to send me $40.00 I had sent home for my savings account. However, two days later on November 15, a notice came out that all furloughs were cancelled due to our flight training being behind schedule. After a phone call, Mom and Dad said they would come out to see me in Kansas. I checked with the hotels in Hays and in Russell only to find there were no rooms available for the next month, so any immediate plans for a visit by my folks had to scrapped

with plans to try again later for December.

Herb Rutter and I brought to the attention of the squadron commander that most of the officers and enlisted gunners, excluding the CFC men, were unfamiliar with the use of the new gunnery system on the B-29. Authorization was given for us to requisition one upper and one lower turret and all the control equipment, and the group sent carpenters to build the wooden skelton we needed to hold the equipment. By the end of a week, we had the system in operation and started instructing those who had never used the system. Rut and I were amazed at the number of officers and enlisted men who were slow in understanding the simple use of the reticle on the sight. In order for the computer for the gunnery system to work properly, it was necessary that the wing span of the attacking aircraft had to be entered into the sighting station. We found that many crew members had never been trained to identify enemy aircraft. As the result of this oversight in the training of crew members prior to coming to Walker, the squadron set up aircraft recognition classes for all squadrons in the group. Rut and I were thankful other men were assigned the instruction in aircraft recognition, as we had our hands full on the use of the system. Shortly, other CFC men helped us out in this part of the training.

On Monday, November 21, I was called to our squadron office and told I had been selected from our group to go to Gulfport, Mississippi, to be one of four men to perform firing tests on the B-29 gunnery system. One CFC man from each of the fields was selected and flown on detached service for about ten days on Wednesday, November 23. We were picked up at our respective fields in a DC-3 in the early morning, arriving in Gulfport after lunch, but the mess hall was expecting us, so sandwiches were ready for us. We were assigned a barracks with only the four of us in it, and we had passes to get off the field. We were told the only schedule we had to meet was when we were posted to fly, and that information would be posted in our barracks each evening in advance. This was about as loose as anyone in the army could expect.

Since we had no duty the afternoon of our arrival, I grabbed a cab and headed for Gulf Park College where Barbara Boyd was a student. Barbara and I had dated while I was at McCallie and I was in a hurry to see her again, as she was my first real love. I had not let Barbara know I was coming, since I was looking to surprise her. When I got out to the college, I presented myself at the reception desk, asking to see Barbara Boyd, and the lady there called her suite while I sat down in anticipation. The receptionist called me over to say that Alice Kain, Barbara's roommate, was coming down. In a couple of minutes, Alice, whom people called

"Putt", came down and told me Barbara had broken her leg ten days earlier and had left by train for Chattanooga the day before. This was a blow, because I had planned on spending as much time as possible with Barbara while I was in Gulfport. I guess this was just another of life's disappointments!

As directed, our group of four reported to the B-29 on the field on the 24th. We were told the CFC system on the plane had been checked out and we would be firing out over the Gulf of Mexico at towed targets. As we boarded, we commented among ourselves on the number of mechanics working on #4 engine. From the amount of oil being cleaned off the right wing, it was obvious #4 had an oil leak repaired. Once in the air, we flew for about thirty minutes and were given permission to test fire our guns. The four of us rotated to each of the sights and fired rounds to assure that all guns were firing properly. The tow plane arrived later and we fired each set of guns at the sleeve target. Prior to leaving the ground, we had the .50 caliber shells dipped in different colors so hits on the target would leave color markings. After about an hour, I reported from my position on top of the plane that #4 engine was throwing heavy oil back over the wing. The engineer also reported his instruments were showing a loss of oil on that engine, so that engine was feathered and we returned to the field. In the afternoon, we CFC men examined the tow target and noticed hits from the shells dipped in red, blue, green, and gold dyes were evident, but no white color showed. This immediately indicated to us that the guns in the tail turret were malfunctioning, as it was the tail guns which had the white dye. Auxiliary external power was already connected to the plane, so we were able to energize the tail turret. From initial inspection, the turret seemed to track with the sight, but we all had our doubts. I asked for and received a bore sighting tool which I attached to one of tail .50s. I locked the sighting station in the tail position, centering the reticle in the sight on a flag pole at the end of the pier about a mile down the beach. I, then, got a hardstand to be able to sight through the bore sighting tool to see if the guns were on the flag pole on the pier. The guns were pointed about 7° to the right of the pole, meaning any bullets would miss their target by about 75 yeards at a 600 yard firing distance. With a volt meter and the bore sighting tool, we reset the turret to track with the sight. Apparently, the CFC ground crew had not checked the tail turrets when harmonizing the system, if they did it at all. In our barracks that night, the four of us figured that a shot from the tail with the error in it would have missed by 122 yards, 366 feet, at 1000 yards, an often used firing distance. That was bad!

Thursday, November 25, was Thanksgiving Day! Our group ate at the mess hall which served us the usual Thanksgiving fare of canned turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. We all ate too much, leaving to take a stroll around Gulfport. With not much

to do, we went back to the base, finding we were to fly again early Friday morning.

At the field that morning, the major who was the pilot told our group we were to instruct a crew which was stationed there. This should have given us a clue that we were not going to do the testing we were sent to do. After the flight, we spoke to the major, telling him we were sent to Gulfport to test and evaluate the gunnery system, not to instruct. He got a little "hot" and told us he could use us as he saw fit. We also asked what type of evaluation sheets did he want us to use and where were we to turn in the reports? His reply was, "You'll be advised". We all thought he must be some sort of a nut! That night, the four of us made up sheets for us to use in making our evaluations, so we would have something to turn in when reporting back to our individual fields.

For the next couple of days, we attempted to fly out over the Gulf, but the plane's engines were malfunctioning, so the ground crews were working on them. The major said we should build a training mockup for future crews. We said we would make a list of the necessary items needed so a requisition could be made for him to sign. This seemed to set the major back a bit, since he apparently didn't want to take the responsibility of putting his name on the request.

When we went to the plane on the 28th, it seemed ready to fly and 100 lb. practice bombs were loaded in the bomb bays. We flew for about an hour where the bombardier made several passes over a small island, dropping the bombs for practice from 10,000 feet. From the side gunnery positions, we reported where the bombs hit - some good, some bad. After the bays were clear of bombs, the pilot notified the crew that he would make four low level passes over the island so the bombardier and side gunners could strafe the mockup structure on the island. On the first pass, we fired from about 1,000 feet with only fair results, seeing the bullets tear up part of the area. The second pass was made at 500 feet and the results were much better. Before the final two passes, I asked the navigator if he had set the proper information into his instruments to give the gun computers what they needed for speed, altitude, and temperature. He reluctantly replied that he had not. After he entered the information, the final two passes gave the best results of the day.

After landing, we removed all the turret covers to take all the ammunition out of the guns. We found one gun in the lower forward turret had jammed so the cartridge had to be removed. The lieutenant who was the armament officer on the field said he would do it by prying the end plate off the .50 caliber machine gun. I jumped over and told him if he took the plate off and pried the bolt spring loose, the cartridge would be pushed into the breech and fire if he didn't put

a block to prevent the firing. I asked him to let me do it. His irritated reply caused me to back off and he went to work with a screwdriver. The pilot had walked around to the front of the plane, so I asked him to move away from the area in front of the gun which was at an angle pointing at the concrete ramp. He had moved slightly when the lieutenant pried the end plate loose and the bolt spring out of its detent. The bolt spring shot to the rear just missing the lieutenant, the bolt slid forward, and the shell fired. The bullet went into the concrete and the back pressure drove the bolt out the back of the gun making a large hole in the turret enclosure. When the bullet hit the concrete, pieces of concrete flew in all directions catching the major in his legs, tearing his trousers and bloodying his legs. The lieutenant was stupified! The major was taken to the hospital with a couple of the ground men, while the lieutenant headed for the operations office. We four CFC men just returned to our barracks, dressed, and headed for town, chatting about how stupid some people could be.

When we reported to the field on the 29th, the plane was having sheet metal work done on it where the hole had been made by the flying bolt which had also punctured the plane's pressurization compartment. No flying was done that day.

On Tuesday, the 30th, we flew again in the afternoon but it was a flight primarily to test the fitness of the plane and engines which had been leaking a great deal of oil. A colonel was our pilot, saying the major's legs were pretty sore. We did fire a few rounds from each of the guns to be certain the system was working well and there were no jams. We guessed the colonel was flying to get his monthly hours on the record without any particular flight plan in mind. It was after dark when the colonel made a rough landing and we knew the mess hall would be closed. As we got to our barracks, the female mess officer was there to tell us she had saved four trays for our dinner. We four were dumbfounded but most appreciative, and she served us herself as there was no one else in the hall.

Our bunch had absolutely nothing to do on Wednesday, December 1. No orders were posted for us. We discussed the fact that our trip to Gulfport was a complete washout as far as we were concerned. Mike Walters, the CFC man from Smoky Hill at Salina, was selected from among us to call his squadron to tell his adjutant what was going on down at Gulfport. We selected Mike because he was a staff sergeant and the ranking man among us and the 58th Wing Headquarters was at Salina. Mike phoned and relayed our impressions and the adjutant told him he would pass the information on to the Wing and try to get us out of Gulfport. All of us felt we were missing our crew training back at our respective fields, plus we were not being able to perform the testing job we were sent to Gulfport to do.

On December 3, we were picked up by a B-17 from Salina and flown first to Pratt, then to Great Bend, then I was dropped off at Victoria before flying on east to Salina. It had certainly been a wasted ten days. Our detached group had learned nothing and the reliability and use of the CFC gunnery system was not really tested. On arrival back at my squadron, the 768th, I reported to the adjutant to turn in my report which I had kept day-by-day while in Gulfport. The captain questioned me while looking at my report. He then asked my frank opinion of the period in Gulfport and I gave it to him as straight as I could. He said he genuinely appreciated my report and he would pass it on to the colonel. Several days later, F/Sgt. Blasko said Gulfport had not sent any report of my flying time and he wanted to add it to my records. He said he had called the field in Gulfport and no one there had kept a record of our flight time, so no record was ever made of any flying time there.

Getting back to Walker Field on Friday, December 3, was like going home for me after that ten days in Gulfport. Before I had left the crew on the detached service, I had asked Mackinaw to pick up any packages and mail I might receive while I was gone. I also told him if any packages looked like they were something to eat to go ahead and open them and share with the rest of the crew. When I walked back into the barracks, Mac gave me my mail and said there had been three packages and they had eaten the contents, but he handed me the names of the people who had sent the goodies, so I could write and thank them.

Saturday, Herb Rutter and I went into Hays and I checked with the Robert E. Lee Hotel on their room availabilities and they told me they had a vacant room for December 17, 18, and 19. They agreed to hold a reservation until the next day, so I called Dad and Mom telling them the dates and the room costs. The folks said they'd call me back in an hour and they did. Dad wired the money to the hotel. The next day when I called the hotel, they said they had received the money and the reservation was confirmed.

While Herb and I were in Hays, we walked by a junk yard and spotted an old 1929 Chevrolet 4-door sedan in the lot, so we went in to look it over. The upper part of the car frame was made of oak wood and the tires, including the spare, were worn down to the white cord, but they seemed to be holding air. The radiator obviously leaked since we could see the rust marks. In examining the engine, we could not find any cracks in the block, but all the hoses were rotten. Since Rut and I had been discussing the need for transportation, this Chevy might give us chance to have a car if we could rebuild it. The car had expired 1942 Colorado license plates on it. We bought the car for $6.00 from the junk dealer and got a bill of sale, and the dealer agreed to hold it there until we could get someone to pull it to the base.

When Rut and I got back to base, we started looking for a place we could park the car to work on it. We approached the fellow who took care of the furnace in our squadron's hanger and we told us there was enough room for the car inside the furnace room. On Sunday, we made arrangements with one of the men in our squadron who had a car to tow the Chevy to the base on Tuesday.

On Monday, the 6th, both Rut and I had to fly. Emphasis was being put on flying; and although it was in a B-17, we flew and shot landings for 2:30 hours in the morning. In the afternoon, I had to instruct gunners on the CFC system on the mockup we'd built. While I was gone to Gulfport, Rut and the others had mounted a turret on the back of a truck, and as we'd planned, had put a 12 gauge shotgun in the mount of the turret. The sight was set behind the turret, so gunners would fire at clay pigeons launched nearby. There were a lot of misses but some hits.

After Rut and I had finished instructing gunners on the 7th, Gay Reed drove us into Hays in his car. We had a rope, so Gay pulled us back the fifteen miles to base in the Chevy. With additional help, we pushed the car into the hanger furnace room. We knew we had a hard row to hoe, but we got anxious to get "The Piece", as we called it, running.

During the period from December 7 through the 10th, our days were taken up with instructing and attending some lectures on the flying procedures of the B-29, plus studies on enemy aircraft recognition during which U.S.fighters' profiles would be intermingled with those of the enemy to teach the gunners not to fire at our own aircraft. As the classes in aircraft recognition progressed, the look at the slide on the screen was reduced from about 2 seconds to about a tenth of a second, only a glance. In the test on Friday, the 10th, I did real well due to our crew studying at night during the week. D.B. Green, our tail gunner, didn't feel the classes were necessary and his test grades showed it. He was required to go through the class again with another group. He was "hot" about that and cussed the system, reflecting his poor attitude.

On Saturday, December 11, our crew spent the day flying in a B-17, flying for 6:30 hours. In the morning, we shot landings for an hour and a half and landed for lunch. In the afternoon, we went through several phases, flying at 20,000 feet on oxygen dropping practice bombs at the Pottawatomie Bombing and Gunnery Range in northern Kansas. After the bombing, we dropped to low level for strafing with our machine guns. Using the guns and turrets on the B-17, of course, was quite different from using them on the B-29. On the B-17,

the gunners had to mentally calculate the amount of lead, bullet drop, and deflection for their bullets to hit the target; whereas, on the B-29 computers for each turret made those corrections, letting the gunners aim directly at the targets. However, if the computers got knocked out or mailfunctioned, the gunners would have to use their guns the same as on the B-17 and other planes, plus the B-29 gunners would have to mentally add a correction for parallax due to the distances between the guns and the sights. For that reason, we felt some good training for that eventuality was necessary by firing the B-17 gunnery system.

On Sunday, we were off duty, so Rut and I spent much of the day working on "The Piece" in the furnace room of the hanger. We found all the valves in the engine were stuck and all the gaskets were pretty well gone. We took the radiator off which was leaking badly and determined that this leakage would present one of our main problems to correct.

After calisthenics on Monday morning, December 13, I dropped by the orderly room to request a three day pass for December 17th, 18th, and 19th, since Dad and Mom were coming out to see me. At first there was some resistance, but the adjutant said he would allow it but I was due to fly on the morning of the 17th, so my pass would begin after that flight, and I was not to leave the area, checking in each day at operations, because so many men were on furlough at that time. I agreed. The rest of the day was spent instructing.

Again, on the 14th, a Tuesday, our crew flew for four hours, mostly dropping practice bombs and giving Steen and Lehwalder practice on formation flying with other planes. At that time, we still had not received enough B-29 planes to enable all crews to fly at once. There was a lot of chatter on the intercom as the lead plane tried to get the planes in the element to fly a tighter, closer formation. We gunners had little to do except keeping the pilot informed if another plane was closing in on us from the rear quarter. That night, Rut and I went back to work on "The Piece".

For the next two days, we again instructed other crew members and also went to classes to receive basic instruction on the B-29 engines, the Wright R3350 engines, and in the electrical system so we CFC men could assist in repair and maintenance work on the plane when necessary. I found the classes very informative and interesting. I learned the workings and part names of the engines, which would make me more useful.

As the adjutant told me when I asked for a 3-day pass, I was scheduled to fly on Friday, December 17, the day Mom and Dad were arriving by train in Hays. We were due to fly at

1100 hours, and the train was due in Hays at 1230 hours. Herb Rutter, my friend, was not due to fly, so he offered to meet the train and get Mom and Dad to the Robert E. Lee Hotel. Our flight actually flew only 1:30 hours, so I landed as the train came in. I went immediately to the adjutant's office where he had my pass ready. After dressing, I was able to catch the bus from base into Hays, getting there about 0100 hours. It was a wonderful feeling to get to see the Folks! After a great deal of talk, Dad said he'd like to go out to the base on Saturday. I explained we'd have to ride the bus out and see if I could get them a pass to come on the base into our area. Even though I had a pass, I went back to the base in the evening after dinner, since there was no vacant room in the hotel for me to stay in town.

On Saturday morning, I picked up a visitors pass and caught an early bus into Hays to have breakfast with the Folks at the hotel. Dad asked if there was any place in town to rent a car, but I was unaware of any. He asked the desk clerk where the closest automobile dealership was and was told that there was a Buick dealer just around the block. We walked to the dealership, and fortunately the owner was there. Dad asked him about renting a car, explaining his desire to see where I was located at the base. After a few minutes of pleasantries, the owner of the dealership pulled a set of keys from his pocket and handed them to Dad, saying he didn't rent any cars but he was welcome to take his personal car, a 1941 Buick 4-door sedan. He asked Dad how long he would be in town, so Dad explained that he and Mom would be catching the train on Monday, the 20th. Without a flinch, the man said Dad was to keep the car until he and Mom left town. Flabbergasted, Dad told the dealer that he hadn't even asked Dad's name, and I recalled the dealer saying, "It doesn't matter. You'll bring it back." Dad gave him his name and address and tried to pay for the car, but the fellow refused anything, telling Dad to just enjoy himself while he was in Hays. With an expression of gratitude and thanks, Dad and I drove back to the hotel to pick up Mom.

Since I had promised to check in at Operations daily while on pass; after driving around the base, I stopped to check the bulletin board in Operations. Of course that was a restricted area and I explained that only I could go into Operations, so I left Mom and Dad in the car outside, pointing out the armed guard on the door. It took me about ten minutes to check out my status, and I returned to the car to find Dad gone. Mom said he had gone in the same door I had, so my first thought was he'd end up arrested and I would be in bad trouble for bringing him there. I rushed back into the building, asking the first person I saw if they had seen a stocky civilian in a brown suit. He answered affirmatively, pointing to the door out onto the field where the B-29 was sitting. I glanced through the window just in time to see Dad climbing the ladder into the cockpit with the armed guard steadying the ladder. My expression was, "Oh,

hell!" I ran out to the plane, crawled up into the cockpit, and asked Dad what in the devil did he think he was doing! He said he just wanted to see what I was flying in. I got him out of there fast, then I asked him how he'd gotten past the guards. He said he just said, "Hi, son!", as he walked past them and no one attempted to stop him. We got to the car, and I got the Folks off the field in a hurry, hoping I wouldn't be called on the carpet over Dad's inspection.

That night, Dad and Mom took several of my friends to dinner in Hays. From my crew were Mackinaw and Schroen, plus Herb Rutter. I tried to get in touch with Ross Briner and his wife who lived in town, but I was unable to contact them. Dad suggested that I invite the officers on the crew, but I explained it might be embarrassing to them due to the rank difference and if they did come, they might receive unfavorable comments from some of their fellow officers.

I drove the car back to base that night, and on Sunday morning I checked Operations to see if there was any schedule for me. There was nothing for me, but some of the men on duty were laughing about Dad's trip past the two guards to see the plane without being challenged. It seemed that everyone was getting a kick out of the episode!

Sunday, we spent the day just visiting and chatting with my trying to answer their questions about what was ahead for me, and they answering my queries about my friends and people at home. We just enjoyed being together again for a short time. At dinner, we had a quiet time and talked until I headed back to base.

On Monday, I was scheduled to fly at noon, so I drove into Hays for breakfast with the Folks, turned in the car with profuse thanks to the Buick dealer, and put Mom and Dad on the train at 1000 hours amid Mom's tears. I rode the bus back to the field, reported in to the orderly room, and went to the flight line to fly at noon. I certainly hated to see Mom and Dad leave, but my schedule was picking up, so it would become harder and harder for me to spend any additional time with them.

Bad weather moved in while we were on navigation flight to Oklahoma City and return. It was snowing as we landed and then turned into a cold rain. That was the last day of flying in December, so I ended the month with 16:00 hours on my flight records.

On Saturday, Christmas Day, December 25, 1943, and for the next two days, our crew and others were given the days off. The men who were married and living off the base didn't

have to report at all. Since several of us had no place to go and had not applied for 3-day passes, mostly from being broke, we just sat around and "shot the breeze", plus napping. In the afternoon, the sergeant in charge of the orderly room dropped by our barracks and said if anyone wanted to come to the mess hall, they could help make ham sandwiches for the maintenance depot personnel for a Christmas party. Since we didn't have anything else to do, we went to help and the surprising part was that no one "bitched" about it. Sunday and Monday during the day, several of us hopped the bus into Hays, walked around for a short while, and went back to base just to break the monotony. For a short while, I did some work on "The Piece", but without Rut, there wasn't a great deal I could do alone since the rebuilding required two men to do it. Two of my friends, Herb Rutter and "Casey" Lucchese, had both received furloughs and had gone home. I loaned Rut $10.00 and "Casey" $20.00, leaving me broke. However, on December 27, Ross and Mary Louise Briner had Mackinaw and me out to dinner at their 2-room apartment in Hays. It was a treat for us!

On the 28th, the entire group was put into flights for attending classes. Our flight was put on the night shift from 1600 hours to 0300 hours. As anyone could imagine, that threw our biological clock into a fit. All lectures were on B-29 procedures, stressing the use of all personnel on the flying crews to be able to assist the plane's specialists in a particular phase of repair and maintenance. We were warned not to take notes or booklets from the room, since the information might fall into the wrong hands. During these meetings, we were directed to ship all excess clothes and materials home and to stencil our names and serial numbers on all clothing and baggage. This directive, of course, fueled rumors that we would be shipping out before long. In our barracks discussions, none of us could see that we were ready to leave, since the squadrons were certainly not equipped with the adequate number of B-29s, plus no one had enough experienced time in the plane. There just weren't enough B-29s coming off the production lines to fill the needs to equip all the squadrons.

On December 30, Niel Tasher called me from Denver to see if I could get to Denver for a New Year's eve party at Jane Waring's home on the 31st. Even though I was broke and an announcement had been made that no furloughs or passes would be issued, I decided to try. I went to see the adjutant asking for a 3-day pass, explaining that I had stayed on base over the Christmas holidays and had helped to prepare the Christmas party for the maintenance depot unit. He thought a minute and said everyone was going to be off duty with little to do on Saturday, January 1, 1944, and Sunday, January 2, 1944. He also said with all the flight classes being cancelled after noon on the 31st, he guessed it would be all right to let me go from noon Friday, December 31, 1943, to midnight January 2, 1944. Further, he said he and I

both would catch hell if I was late. He cautioned that all 3-day passes were restricted to no more than 50 miles from base with a twinkle in his eye! Knowing of that restriction, I naturally didn't tell him where I was going on that pass, and obviously, he didn't want to know.

I left the adjutant's office and checked the train schedule to Denver. I found that the train left Hays at 1600 hours, arriving in Denver at 2220 hours, so I called Tash saying I was coming and giving him my arrival time. He said someone would meet me at the station but it wouldn't be he, since the hostess, Jane Waring, was his date and the party started at 2100 hours.

On Friday, the 31st, at 1600 hours, I was at the train station in Hays ready to leave, but it was running late and didn't pull in until 1700 hours, a hour late. The conductor said they were trying to make up time but he figured it would be hard to do. It was about 260 miles to Denver and after my train was sidetracked for a few minutes to let a freight carrying war materials run by, it finally arrived in Denver at 2325 hours. Jumping off and hurrying into the terminal, I started looking for someone who was going to meet me. Walking through the terminal, I heard a bunch of soldiers whistling, so I turned to see what had attracted their attention. There came Penny Schmidt, whom I had dated when in Denver! She was dressed in a black dress and a fur jacket with her high heels beating a tattoo on the terminal floor. With her red hair, she was a knockout! We beat it to her car and went to Jane Waring's house, arriving at about two minutes before midnight and the new year. Of course, the party really started in earnest at that time with a table of food and plenty to drink for those who wanted it. The rug in the living room had been rolled back and many guests were dancing to a record player. There were about thirty people there, many of whom I knew from my time in Denver. Tash had introduced me to a great many civilians while I was stationed at Lowry Field. The party broke up about 0600 hours, so Tash, Jane, Penny, and I left the Waring's house after the girls changed to more casual clothes and went to Shirley Godfrey's house a couple of miles away for breakfast. The breakfast actually ended up more like a brunch because people dropped in all morning. We left there and drove to Lakeland where a band was playing. We had some snacks for dinner there then drove back into the city to Jane Waring's house where Tash and I cleaned up while the girls changed clothes again for a party at the home of a couple I'd never met. Our new hosts were Bob and Lucy Richards. Bob was vice president of Armstrong Cork Company, in charge of company operations in the western part of the country. He and I had the opportunity to talk quite a bit. At about 0200 Sunday, January 2, we started to leave and Bob called me over to ask if I would be interested in joining his company after the war. Bob was a graduate of the University of Virginia and was originally from Harrisonburg, Virginia. I told him I was most appreciative of the offer but the war still had a long way to go and whenever I became a civilian

again I wanted to complete my education at Washington & Lee. As we left, Bob again said to keep his offer in mind and let him know if I changed my plans. We then drove to Tash's house where we sat in the living room talking and drifting into short naps until Mrs. Tasher, Tash's mother, came down and fixed us some breakfast. We talked until noon when it was time to take me to the train station for my trip back to base. The train was due to leave at 1400 hours, but again it was late. I sent Tash and the girls on home since there was no reason for them to wait with me, and I knew we all were about asleep on our feet. I had to keep walking around until the train pulled in, knowing I'd doze off if I sat down. Finally, the train pulled in a little before 1500. With the usual delays for freight trains passing and meeting our train, I arrived in Hays at 2220 hours and it was 2310 by the time I reported to the orderly room. I realized I had had no more than a few minutes of naps since I left the base on Friday and this was the end of Sunday. I was dead! What a way to start 1944!

On Monday, January 3, I didn't go to breakfast but slept till about 1000 hours as the result of all that lack of sleep in Denver. When the men on the crew dragged me out of the sack, I was still punchy, but I would have caught the devil if I had not shown up for calisthenics. Rut had gotten back from furlough, so we did a little work on "The Piece" in the afternoon before we had to go to class at 1600. During class, I had a hard time keeping awake, but I fell in bed at 0200 without grabbing anything to eat.

I had a pleasant surprise in the mail as another box from Aunt Ruby, Mom's sister, arrived loaded with "goodies". She was wonderful about sending boxes and the men in the barracks added notes to her on my letters, letting her know how we all enjoyed everything she sent.

On Saturday, January 8, 1944, we flew for 3:00 hours in a B-29 on a practice navigation and bombing run from our base over Cheyenne, Wyoming, then over Bottoms, and returned to base. The next day, we again took the B-29 up for 3:30 hours, flying from high to low altitude in the general vicinity of our immediate area. Again, on Monday, the 10th, we were assigned a B-17 and we flew most of six hours at high altitude on oxygen. That type of flying is tiring, but we figured we learned something.

On January 15, 1944, orders were posted promoting me to corporal together with other CFC men who had been privates first class since we ended armament school. We really felt cheated on rank when we saw other men advancing. Herb Rutter was promoted to tech sergeant, Ross Briner and J.B. Mackinaw both made sergeant, as we made corporal.

Regardless of our resentment of the system, not the individuals, I was pleased to get the additional stripe.

About the middle of the month, I received a nice letter from Dr. Gaines, President of Washington & Lee, thanking me for my Christmas card to him and his family. It gave me a good shot of morale, knowing that he would take his time to drop me a line. Dr. Gaines was a great person to me and to all the students at the university.

Our flight classes continued but they seemed to be winding down. The ground personnel were told to get their affairs in order since they would probably be shipping out in about one month. We, who were flying, were told our classes would end the latter part of February. We were told to be ready to pull out on two hours notice. In the month of January, 1944, we flew a total of 22:50 hours. All flights were in the B-29, except the flight on the 10th which was in a B-17. At least a few more B-29s were being delivered to our field.

Rut and I got "The Piece" running, so we had transportation. We never could stop the radiator leaks but we carried a 5-gallon can of water when we went out. Also, we never did attempt to register the car for license plates in Kansas, but we drove it with the 1942 Colorado plates. All the tires continued to be worn our showing the cord. We did have trouble at night because when the speed got to about 60 mph, the lights would go out. We never could correct that problem, so we carried two five-cell flashlights with us. Our main original worry was how we were going to buy gas, not having a ration book. However, by luck we told the Shell Oil service station man at the intersection of the base road and the road between Hays and Russell of our problem. He volunteered to give us whatever gas we needed, explaining that many of the trucks getting his gas would hand him their ration books to tear out the coupons, so he would just tear out a few extra ones to cover the gas he gave us. The offer was a real godsend! One Thursday night, we drove into Russell and found a restaurant serving good steaks. As we were leaving after dinner to head back to base, we ran into two lieutenants from our Group who were ground armament officers. They were Jim Ruoff of the 770th Squadron and Charles Roseberg from the 771st Squadron. They had just missed the bus, so we offered them a ride back to base. As it turned out, for nearly every Thursday thereafter, we gave them a ride to the steakhouse and they bought our meals. They liked the arrangement and Rut and I liked it too.

February, 1944, opened with heavy flying, about equally split between the B-29 and the B-17. On February 3, we made a navigation flight with a simulated bombing run over Nashville,

Tennessee, and Fort Worth, Texas, before heading back to base for 4:10 hours in the B-29. Then, the next night we made the same trip over the same route.

On February 6, We started our processing for overseas duty. I signed up for a $25.00 war bond to be deducted from my pay and sent home each month, starting March 1. In the processing, we were advised to send home any articles we didn't need and to make out a will with a power of attorney to be mailed home on a form given to us.

On the days we weren't scheduled to fly, we worked on the planes with the ground crews, learning maintenance and repair. I felt I learned something new each day. On Friday, the 11th, our crew flew a B-17 to the B-29 assembly plant at Wichita, Kansas, and picked up a new B-29, flying it to Pratt, since the plane was scheduled for delivery to the 40th Bomb Group there. We spent the night at Pratt. The next morning, we left Pratt on the flight plan from the previous day in a different B-29, flying to the practice bombing range, then over Denver, and on to Dallas, before setting down in Oklahoma City to deliver the plane at Tinker Field where the radar was to be installed. In the two days on this trip, we had flown a total of 10:05 hours. We were scheduled to bring another B-29 back to our base, but the installation of the radar was not complete, so we spent the night there in Oklahoma City. This suited Steen fine, since Oklahoma City was his home. On the morning of the 14th, we flew a B-17 back to our base. Getting back to Walker, we found we were scheduled that afternoon, so we flew a B-17 on a practice bombing mission. On the 15th, our crew was flown before daylight back to Tinker Field at Oklahoma City and ferried a B-29 back to our base, getting back before noon. That afternoon, we again took a B-17 up for high altitude bombing practice. In the first fifteen days of February, our crew had flown 28:40 hours. We'd been busy!

On the night of February 15, Jim Ruoff, the lieutenant from the 770th Squadron, came by to see me, asking if he could borrow "The Piece". Naturally, I wanted to know why he wanted it. He said he wanted to drive to Denver to get married and bring his new bride back to Hays. I told him I thought he was absolutely nuts to think "The Piece" could make the trip. The tires were nothing, plus the license plates were "1942 Colorado" and we had no registration. He said he'd chance it. Rut and I confered and reluctantly we agreed to let him take it, feeling that would be the last time we'd see "The Piece".

On Wednesday, February 16, 1944, our Group's maintenance outfit, ground echelons, and some members of flying crews were shipped out by train to a port on the east coast, heading for overseas, but no one knew where they were going. Our crew only knew "Lee"

Lehwalder, "Tommy" Thomas, and Ross Briner were sent out. Most of the personnel remaining on the field were flying personnel, plus those who were not being scheduled to go with us but would stay on the field to join the new Group which would be arriving after we left. By nightfall, our barracks showed several vacancies.

Next morning, the 17th, the first sergeant notified us that 10% of the men who had gone the longest without furloughs would get a 7-day one. On the 18th, I was listed for one of the furloughs. I immediately wired Dad to send me money for my train ticket. As it turned out, all the furloughs were rescinded, or "delayed" they said, due to the personnel being needed on the base at that time. Naturally, that was a big disappointment. The first sergeant said he felt the furloughs would be delayed for about two weeks. Another turn-around took place on the 19th, and I got my 7-day furlough starting on February 20, 1944, at noon. In checking train schedules, I found I could get to Johnson City in the early evening of February 22, making a change in Memphis. This would give me three days at home, as I had to be back on base by Sunday, February 27.

I left the base, catching the noon train on the 20th. As expected, the train was late, but I was able to make my connection in Kansas City for Memphis. Once in Memphis I had to connect with the train from New Orleans which went across Tennessee, through Chattanooga, to Johnson City, arriving in the early evening of the 22nd. I had talked with Barbara, and she was to come from Gulfport to Johnson City, arriving late in the morning of the 23rd. Getting in sooner than she did, I had already started to see if I could obtain of waiver on the 3-day waiting period to get married, required by the State of Tennessee. I felt I had that worked out. As things turned out, Barbara's parents had met her at the train station in Chattanooga as she went through there, asking her to promise not to get married on this short period of time, and she agreed. When she arrived in Johnson City, I told her of my plans, and she said her parents had anticipated my thinking and she had promised not to get married at that time. My call to Chattanooga changed nothing with her father say, "You're nothing but a guinea pig on that new plane and it would not be fair to either of you". Of course, I was in love and I didn't agree, but on later analysis, I had to agree he was right. I even countered with his arguments that I had $10,000 insurance, but all that did was to make Barbara angry.

We spent three wonderful days together, doing very little except being with each other. We had a lot of time to fill in with the time we'd been part. I think Mom had to call down from upstairs each night to get us to go to bed. I caught the train at 1000 hours on the 25th, heading back to Kansas. Barbara had stayed another day in Johnson City, and I arrived back on base

at 1800 hours on February 27.

Getting back to the squadron, I was pleasingly surprised to find I had been promoted to sergeant on February 21, 1944, just a little over a month after making corporal. The other CFC men were also promoted, so we felt maybe we were at least getting some recognition. There was no celebration over the promotions, as we all felt it was long overdue.

On the afternoon of the 28th, I got a call from Jim Ruoff saying "the Piece" was in a ditch about forty miles from Hays. He was bringing his bride back from Denver when snow covered the road, causing him to run into a ditch. He said he'd notified the highway patrol. I figured "The Piece" was gone! Seeing him later, he told Rut and me that he was sure he would hear from the highway patrol shortly. He certainly was the perfect optimist, but Rut and I weren't.

The weather really turned "stinking" almost from the time I returned from furlough. It snowed on the 28th, it snowed more on the 29th (It was a leap year), and on March 1. All planes were grounded, so we spent the days working on the planes in the cold hangers. It was down right cold. The wind was whipping around, swirling the snow into drifts.

On March 2, Jim Ruoff came by to say he'd had a call from the Colorado Highway Patrol, saying they had towed "The Piece" into their depot and he could pick it up. He got someone to drive him to the depot where he picked up the car which had gas put in it and drove it back to base. The highway patrol never questioned him about the 1942 license plates or the condition of the car. They never asked about the registration. Rut and I were completely numb over the entire happenings of "The Piece".

Steen had flown to Wichita to help another crew bring a new plane back to the field, but the weather turned so sour he didn't get back until the 5th. The CFC men were organized into teams to make gunnery system modifications on all the B-29s on the field on March 2. At least that gave us something constructive to do in place of doing clothing checks and make-work projects. The weather finally broke and we flew on the 11th. It was just a training flight to check the modifications made on a B-29. The flight was nothing exceptional, just routine.

We were told General "Hap" Arnold was at the 58th Wing Headquarters on the 9th at Salina, asking how many B-29s were ready to leave on the 10th for overseas. He was told "None"! The original plan had been that 150 B-29s would leave on March 10, 1944, but due to the lack of materials reaching the assembly lines and the continuous modifications, plus the

maintenance personnel having shipped out from the fields, the planes had not reached the four fields in the Wing. The general immediately initiated what came to be called "The Battle of Kansas". He ordered all red tape to be bypassed and work to be scheduled around the clock to have all planes delivered to the fields in time to have all planes gone overseas by April 15. It seemed an impossible task, but it was done!

On Sunday, the 12th, we completed all the CFC modifications necessary on the planes on the field and no new planes were due to come in for at least a week, so we had no duty scheduled for the coming week.

As a complete surprise to everyone, early on Monday, March 13, 1944, those of us on flying status were given 5-day passes, if requested, provided we would be back on base by Friday, March 17, at the latest. I threw some clothes in my flight bag and Rut drove me to Hays where I caught the first train going east. Since it would shorten the train trip and lengthen the time I would have to see everyone, I wired Dad and Mom that I would be in Chattanooga for two days if they wanted to drive down to meet me, and I would contact Jamie and Stephen on arrival Tuesday afternoon late.

As usual all trains ran late but I got into Chattanooga about 1830 hours, Tuesday evening, and called Jamie. I took a cab out to the house, and Mom and Dad pulled in within thirty minutes of my arrival. I called Barbara's house as soon as I got in, hoping by some chance she would be in town, but she was still in school in Gulfport, so there was no way I would have the chance to see her. I saw several of the parents of my friends who were in service, then I ran by McCallie, seeing Bud Burns, Mr. McIlwaine, and Bob and Spence McCallie. It was a fast two days, but it was great to see everyone even for a short time. Dad, particularly, kept asking me where I going to be sent; but, of course, I had no idea. I did tell him I thought we'd be leaving around the middle of April. On Thursday, the 16th, I caught the train out of Chattanooga about 1500 hours, and arrived in Memphis about 2200 hours. Lt. Irving Olswing, the copilot on Wilging's crew in our squadron, boarded there. He had taken his furlough at his home there in Memphis. I was glad to have someone to talk with on the way back to base and we got back a little after 2300 hours on Friday, the 17th, where it was snowing.

Over the next few days, new personnel arrived on base. They were to take over the base when we flew out. On the 18th, I ran into Gwyn Brock from Chattanooga who had been with me at McCallie. He was assigned to the new maintenance outift moving in with the next

new Group to occupy the field. It was great to see him and I was able to give him the recent information from my two days in Chattanooga.

On Monday, March 27, 1944, a new B-29 came in from the factory and was assigned to our crew. It was B-29, Model 1, built in Wichita, Kansas, and painted with camouflage colors of olive drab. The serial number was 42-6248, and last digits of 26248 were painted on the dorsal tail. It was one of the first fifty B-29s built for combat. On this same day I shipped all my extraneous items home by railway express from Hays.

We felt #248 was ready to go, but plans were changed so often that nothing was certain. We worked on the plane in the sun with our shirts off, as the weather was so warm, then the morning of the 28th, it snowed again. With the snow, it was impossible to work outside on the ramp, so we concentrated on the interior of the plane.

On the 29th, feeling that the plane was in good shape, we ran the engines up and found oil leaking, so we worked on that problem all day. The next morning, the 30th, we taxied onto the runway for takeoff, and one of the turbos went out, taking us back to the ramp. On the 31st, the last day of March, we took off on an engineering hop to test the engines, but the flight lasted only forty-five minutes due to a bad oil leak developing on #1 engine.

On April 1, 1944, Ralph Steen was promoted to captain, and the crew was happy for him since we felt it was long overdue. Of course he was well pleased. The same day, Rut and I gave the keys to "The Piece" to Jim Ruoff who was staying on the field with the incoming new Group. We told him to sell it for whatever he could get and send us a money order. Rut and I had no further use for the car, since we were restricted to base, pending our leaving for overseas.

For the first five days of April, we worked on #248 day and night, averaging only about four hours sleep each night after finding several little malfunctions which needed repaired or replaced from the manufacture. On April 5, we took the plane up for four hours, wringing it out from high altitude to low level and it reacted well. Steen even pulled the plane into a stall to check the reaction, and it performed well. After the flight, we had minor adjustments, like tightening the rocker box covers on the engines but nothing major.

On April 6, we started loading some of the equipment we would take overseas with us. In the front bomb bay, we had a wooden platform which hung on the bomb shackles. We

loaded some of the boxes we were to take with us on the platform, plus some of the squadron's medical supplies. In the rear bomb bay, we loaded a spare R3350 engine, plus a small platform for luggage. By the end of the day on April 6, we had practically everything ready to go. On April 7, we flew with the heavy load for 9:20 hours, giving us the feel of a fully loaded aircraft. The plane flew well.

Since Lehwalder, Thomas, and Briner from our crew had shipped out earlier with the ground personnel on February 16, our copilot became George Hadley, whose crew had shipped out, and T/Sgt. Benedict Lahuta, Hadley's right gunner, replacing Briner. As another passenger, we had Capt. George M. Dyer, the squadron medical officer flying with us. We were put on alert, expecting to leave on Saturday, April 8, but we were told to stay on ready, because the weather at our first landing had turned so bad, so we'd have to delay until Sunday.

With the delay, we had no choice but to go back to our barracks, going by the supply room to again draw some blankets and a pillow, so we'd have a place to sleep that night. Also, since all our clothing was packed aboard the plane, all we had with us were our toilet articles, so we had to figure on sleeping in our underwear without a change of clothes. After dinner in the mess hall, we went to a movie, notifying the orderly room first where we could be reached in the event there was any additional change of plans.

As anyone in my position could imagine, I couldn't keep my thoughts on the movie, so I left before it was over and wandered back to the barracks. Knowing the OD would probably be waking us up early, all of us tried to get to sleep early, but with other men in the same room, it was hard to block out the noise. We did take some of the time to address cards to our home and to friends, giving our new address, an APO number, which had been given us a little earlier, although we had no idea wher we were heading. We understood Steen and Weaver, our navigator, knew where our first flight leg was going, but they were not allowed to tell the crew until we were in the air.

It must have been about 2300 hours when I finally dropped off to sleep, after lying in bed for quite a while, mentally checking off everything we had done in preparation for leaving the field to head into a new environment, leading to doing the job we'd been trained for since joining the service. I felt I was mentally and physically ready to do my job, and I was looking forward to what was ahead for us.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

THE CHINA-BURMA-INDIA THEATER OF OPERATIONS (CBI)

Sgt. Walter H. Lancaster, Jr.
13120365
768th Bomb Squadron (VH)
462 Bomb Group (VH)
APO 493
New York, New York

On Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944, the DO woke us at 0500 hours. After a quick breakfast, we climbed aboard #248. All gassed up and rolling, we lifted off on a flight plan to take us to Gander, Newfoundland. The plan called for us to leave Walker AAF at Victoria, Kansas, on a direct flight over Buffalo, New York, then pick up a heading direct to Gander after a slight turn to the left. We passed over areas covered with snow and then broke into the bright sunlight with smooth air. We could see Detroit to our left as we flew over Lake Erie, and we lowered our altitude as we approached Buffalo and got a good look at Niagara Falls, continuing over a part of Lake Ontario before seeing Watertown, New York. About that time, we received a radio call directing us to change our destination from Gander to the Army Air Field at Presque Isle, Maine, due to extremely poor weather conditions at Gander. There was little correction due on our heading, since Presque Isle was close to our original route. As we landed in Presque Isle, the weather was freezing rain. For the last hundred miles, we had flown below an overcast and had a good look at the vast amount of timber with only logging roads running through the Maine countryside. When we landed after 8:15 hours after leaving our Kansas base, we fully expected we'd be on our way to Gander the next day.

After landing and being fed, we were given bunks in a rundown, cold barracks. With so many planes being diverted to the Presque Isle field, there just wasn't enough space to take care of all of us. One B-29 had run off the end of the runway on landing and that mess had to be cleaned up, but no one had been hurt. Since one crew member had to stay with the plane at all times, I volunteered to sleep in #248 after getting a look at our accommodations. With the down-filled sleeping bags we had, I was as warm as I could ask for even though the temperature outside and inside the plane was below freezing.

On the 10th, I agreed again to stay with #248, since we had nothing to do on the base, being restricted to the base area only. That night, D. B. Green, borrowed a pass from a soldier stationed there, and slipped off the field into Presque Isle, got drunk, and was picked up by the MPs. As discipline, Steen assigned him to guard duty on #248 for the next ten

nights.

For the next five days, we stayed in Presque Isle waiting for the weather at Gander to clear, but the elements gave us no cooperation. Our time was spent checking the plane, while cussing the weather and the muddy conditions. In order to prevent the weight of the B-29s from cracking the reventment asphalt, we moved the plane about six inches each day, using a tractor attached to the front nose wheel gear. With the number of B-29s waiting, the personnel on the field were overwhelmed in moving planes.

On Saturday, April 15, the weather cleared and we flew for 2:50 hours from Presque Isle to Gander, Newfoundland. With this flight, we left the U.S.A. , triggering the start of our overseas pay. We got into Gander about noon and were standing around #248 waiting for a truck to take us to Operations after locking the plane down when we noticed an antiaircraft gun unit firing at a sleeve target being towed by a Canadian Beaufort behind it. As the plane swung into a turn to fly back near the anitaircraft unit, the guns opened up but their line of fire was along the line of the plane's turn and the Beaufort was shot down. Sirens and ambulances converged on the spot where the plane fell, but the plane was destroyed and the pilot was killed. Everyone was shocked!

Since the plane seemed to be operating well, we did very little on Sunday, the 16th, except refueling and inspecting the engines for oil leaks. At the enlisted men's club, there was a bar where men could buy a shot of Canadian Club whisky for 10¢. Although I didn't drink, I stood in line to pick up additional shots for those who wanted more than just the small shot. In every crowd there was always at least one man who wanted to make an ass out of himself, and that night there was one. He had filled a Coke bottle full of shots and was drinking it straight. Before long, he was taken to bed by some of his crew members.

On the afternoon of April 17, we received our orders for the next leg of our trip and we took off for Marrakech, Morocco, in North Africa. After takeoff on the longest, uphill runway, we settled down watching the landscape slip beneath us for about an hour when we started to pass over St. Johns, the capital of Newfoundland. All of a sudden, #3 engine started throwing oil and smoking with the pressure dropping fast. Immediately, we turned back to Gander. We landed after being in the air only 2:00 hours. Darkness had fallen by the time we taxied back to the parking revetment, so we had lights and a generator brought to the plane with a hardstand. On inspection, we found a main oil hose had split, letting all the oil flow out. The weather was again turning mighty cold, so we decided to wait till morning to make the repair,

since we couldn't be cleared to leave that night. Fortunately, there was a supply of B-29 parts at Gander. On the 18th, heaters with blowers were brought to the plane, and we worked putting in new oil lines and hoses with Ben Lahuta directing what was needed for the rest of us to do to help him. By afternoon on the 20th, we had the replacements made and we ran up the engine with good results and no new problems. We had been unable to do any work on the 19th due to extremely bad weather and blowing snow.

On Friday, April 21, we again set out for Marrakech in the late afternoon with the temperature at 27° with blowing snow. As we flew low over St. John's, we saw people waving to us. After passing St. John's, we climbed to 10,000 feet and headed out over the Atlantic Ocean. Since there was no reason for me to be in my seat on top of the plane and no reason for Green to be in his tail position, we rotated each hour with Lahuta and Mackinaw at the side seats keeping watch over the engines. Our magnetic heading was about 128° to the southeast of Newfoundland. We left Gander with winter jackets warming us, but as our flight progressed we shed our heavier clothing, as the temperature was warming. At Gander I had picked up Helen McGinnis' book, "Most Secret" and during the night, I read the entire contents under a map light.

About two thirds of the way to Marrakech, we flew south of the Azores Islands. It seemed every light on the islands was turned on, making them look like a ship in the middle of the ocean. In most cities throughout the world, there would be a blackout at night, but since the Azores were owned by Portugal, which was neutral during the war, I guessed the blackout was not required. Seeing the lights gave us a warm feeling since the night was black for over eight hours. Shortly after the sun rose, Vicory picked up the coast of North Africa on his radar scope. Hitting landfall, we flew about 100 miles inland to the base at Marrakech. We'd covered about 2,700 miles and had been in the air 13:15 hours.

The first thing we noticed on climbing out of the plane was the heat. The temperature was over 100° and the wind was blowing in gusts, causing dust to cover everything. The field was covered with B-29s, plus British and French aircraft. Of course, the date was April 22, having flown all night. Since #248 was running so well, we were anxious to get our orders for the next leg of our flight hopefully the next day. We were sent to a billet in a tent set up in an olive grove. It was hot and dry and the dust settled even in our food at the mess hall. I picked and ate some of the ripe olives off the tree outside our tent, finding them much sweeter than what we had bottled in the States. I'd never had an olive off the tree before.

The next morning, we found we were due for a delay. Just before we arrived, a B-29 had cracked up just off the end of the raunway due to it not being able to develop enough power. In analyzing the reasons for the crash, it was found the octane of the gas was not up to the 100 rating necessary for the B-29 engines. That crack up was the first B-29 lost on the overseas move. As the result of the low rating of the gasoline, all planes were grounded until a new barge of 100 octane gas arrived. All B-29 crews were restricted to the base, so the days were monotonous with nothing for us to do, since we felt the plane was ready to move on. It was impossible to stay in the tent due to the heat.

One afternoon, Mackinaw and I borrowed passes from two of the cadre assigned to the base and slipped into town. We walked around for a short while and went back to the base, because we felt every M.P. we saw was tracking us. We were nervous as cats, knowing what would happen to us if we were caught. Actually, we were relieved when we returned the passes to the men.

Since one of us enlisted men had to be on guard duty at the plane at all times, I ended up sleeping on #248 twice during our stay in Marrakech. After sundown, the plane cooled off, making it fairly comfortable on the bunk in the rear section of the plane. Also, Dixie Schroen set the radio frequency for me to pick up Axis Sally from Berlin when I turned on the batteries. The propaganda was lousy but the music was good. It was on the German broadcasts I first heard the song, "Lili Marlene"!

The new aviation gas with the correct octane rating finally arrived. All the B-29 crews on the field worked to drain all the gas in all the planes and refill with the new shipment. All the engines needed the proper power for takeoff and to develop climbing power to clear the Atlas Mountains on our next leg of our trip to Cairo, Egypt.

One of the nights I slept on #248 on security duty was Wednesday, April 26, 1944, my 20th birthday! Frankly, I had almost forgotten it until Green asked me what the date was earlier. "C'est le guerre", as the Frenchmen on the base said!

On Sunday, April 30, we left in the early morning on our next leg to Cairo, Egypt. The flight took us eight hours for the 2350 miles since we had a tail wind most of the way. After clearing the Atlas Mountains, we flew over the desert of Algeria, Lybia, and Egypt. Steen dropped down to a lower altitude so we could see the massive amount of litter the entire way. There was no way we could distinguish to whom the destroyed equipment belonged, but we

surmised it belonged to both the Allied and the Axis troops. That was the field of battle on which Rommel of Germany and Montgomery of Great Britian fought for the control of the Suez Canal with U. S. troops joining the fight in 1942. We discussed how the conditions under which the battles took place must have been something to behold.

Approaching Cairo, Steen flew by the pyramids and the Sphinx, so we could get a good look at them. For the trip from Marrakech, #248 had flown well, but the propeller on #3 engine was failing to respond to controls. As we were led to a revetment for parking on Paine Field, we noticed a wrecked B-29 across the runway from where we were parked. After parking, we inspected #3 engine and found a malfuction in the prop governor which controlled the pitch of the propeller. O'Malley, our flight engineer, being a regular army man, brought up that the technical manual said the prop governor was "not to be repaired but replaced". He said he would go to Operations and wire Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio, for a replacement to be flown out to us, since there were none on the field. He came back from Operations saying it would take at least a week for the shipment to reach us. That really hit us like a ton of bricks, because we were already running behind schedule in reaching our ultimate destination. At the enlisted men's club on the night of Tuesday, May 2, I ran into Joe Banner with whom I had been in CFC school at Lowry. I found out it was his crew's plane which had wrecked on landing there due to the brakes locking. That was the second B-29 destroyed enroute after leaving the States. It was my turn for guard duty on the plane on May 3, so I was alone most of the day. I kept looking at the prop governor we'd taken off #3 engine and thinking, if it had to be replaced, why not take it apart to see where the trouble was. After cutting the safety wire, I took the bolts out, separating the two halves of the unit. The top half of the governor consisted of the electrical controls and the lower half contained the hydraulic controls. Between the two halves was a neoprene gasket about the size of a quarter and it was split, allowing the hydraulic fluid to get into the top half, fouling the electric contacts. I washed the whole governor in a bucket of 100 octane gas I'd drained from the wing sump, cleaning all the parts. I then walked across the runway to the wrecked plane and found a prop governor with a broken case but the neoprene gasket was intact. Back at #248, I inserted the undamaged gasket into our prop governor, put it back together, and tied the bolts down with safety wire. I centered the blades of the prop and bolted the governor into place on #3 engine. Despite the threat of execution from O'Malley of anyone starting the engines without his being there, I started #3 and cycled the prop, moving the blades as needed. The prop governor worked perfectly. When the crew came to the plane on the morning of the 4th, I told Steen what I had done and O'Malley "blew up". They started the engine and ran the prop through with no problems. Steen said he was filing for Karachi, our next stop, and O'Malley was cussing me.

We took off about 0830 hours on May 4, and flew our next leg to Karachi, India, a distance of about 2,400 miles, and the trip took us 10:30 hours in the air.

When we got the orders to go to Karachi, all doubt as to what theater of operations we would be in disappeared. We then knew we were going to the Far East. Until that time, there was always the possibility we would be assigned to bomb in Europe from Cairo and land in England, be refueled and reloaded with bombs, and bomb again on the return flight to Cairo. This was called "shuttle bombing". We had hoped we'd be used against Japan, since the B-29 was the only bomber with the range and bomb load to perform well in the Pacific theater of operations. Also, the B-29 had been designed and built for that use.

Our route from Cairo on May 4, 1944, took us across Saudi Arabia, cutting across the southern part of the Persian Gulf, and touching the tip of Oman. The land below seemed to be desert. We then flew into the Gulf of Oman, parallelling the coast of Iran just off the land area. There were high cliffs on that southern coastline of Iran and, to our surprise, there were green crops or grasses growing on the land above the cliffs. Continuing down the coastline, we passed over the border into India while still out over the waters of the Arabian Sea, which was part of the Indian Ocean. At about 350 miles from Karachi, we began to see villages along the coast and small fishing boats dotted the ocean below. About 125 miles out of Karachi, we flew into Sonmiani Bay, hitting landfall just prior to landing at the field in Karachi. It was dark and late when we landed, since by flying east, we had been "bucking" the sun all day. On landing, we were held in the plane until we crew members and the interior of the plane were fumigated with a spray before being transported to a barracks.

For the next three days, we were held at Karachi, but we were given passes to go into the city. Before walking into the city, we were able to exchange our U.S. dollars for Indian rupees, a rupee being worth a slight bit more than a U.S. quarter. We found the place about what we expected, being dirty and smelly; but in some areas of the city, large, well groomed, attractive homes existed. There were many beggars on the streets, which bothered us constantly. On May 7, we were told our hold up there was due to the runway and taxi strips at our final destination field were not totally completed, but we would leave the next day anyway. That day we flew 3:25 hours on an engineering hop, checking the plane after work on it.

On Monday, May 8, 1944, we flew out of Karachi to the east for about 1300 miles to Piardoba, India, which was to be our home and main base for almost a year. The trip to Piardoba took 6:15 hours. Our flying time from Walker AAF at Victoria, Kansas, to Piardoba,

India, was 54:30 hours and had taken us 29 days due to all the interruptions and delays.

Of the delays, the gasoline problem at Marrakech was the worse, particularly due to the fact that all four B-29 Groups were grounded, causing all the B-29s reaching their respective Indian bases about the same time. By May 8, 1944, 130 B-29s had arrived at their individual fields in India.

Our Group, the 462nd Bomb Group, was at Piardoba, located about 90 miles northwest of Calcutta and 62 miles north of Kharagpur, where the 20th Bomber Command and the 58th Wing headquarters were situated. Kharagpur was also the home of the 468th Bomb Group and about 90 miles west of Calcutta. Chakulia, the main base of the 40th Bomb Group, was about 110 miles west of Calcutta and 60 miles west of Kharagpur. Initially, the 444th Bomb Group flew into Charra which was about 140 miles northwest of Calcutta, but problems with sloping runways, plus extreme temperatures, caused a move of the 444th to Dudhkundi on July 1, 1944, just 22 miles from Kharagpur. All fields runways were 7500 feet long.

Piardoba was no more than a small village. The closest town was Bishnupur about six miles away, and there was a British fighter field about half way between Piardoba and Bisnupur. Seldom did anyone go there. Our barracks weren't ready when we flew in, so our crew's enlisted men spent about three weeks in a tent. The tent wasn't on level ground, so everytime the rains came, a river of water flowed through our quarters. After a couple of floods, we built a wooden floor and let the water run under it. About June 1, we moved into the new barracks, making us more comfortable with concrete floors and a thick thatch roof. Our bunks were made of a wooden frame with grass ropes strung through holes in the frame and laced within it. We all bought cotton mattresses from a Hindu shop on base and put our air mattresses between the ropes and the cotton. The sway in the ropes in our beds varied with the humidity. Often, we felt we were sleeping in a hammock in damp weather. We had mosquito nets over each bunk with the net tucked under the mattresses at night. It was always so hot that a wet print of my body was on my sheets each morning. We hired a Hindu to clean, make our bunks, and to do our laundry. He was happy as a lark, receiving three rupees each week from each man in the barracks. Our crew couldn't pronounce his Hindu name, so we called him, "Lightning". He told us he was sixteen years old and had a wife and one child. Our crew bought him shirts and shorts, and he was thrilled, but some of the other barracks fussed at us, since their bearers wanted shirts and shorts too.

Shortly after getting to Piardoba, we were called to a meeting of the entire Group. A

major gave us a talk on India and the Hindu people, explaining the caste system within the country. He also gave us the many differences between our behavior and theirs. In other words, he was cautioning us to be careful of our actions and behavior while in India. He brought out that many marriages take place at a very young age since the life expectancy in India was only 27 years. I mmediately thought of "Lightning", our houseboy, being only sixteen and married with a child.

I worked at the plane daily, checking the CFC system and working on the engines with the others. We were told our ground maintenance men who left the States by ship in February would join us shortly. Since there were very few B-29s on the field in Kansas before the ground men were shipped out, the air crews who flew over were expected to work with the arriving ground men to teach them about the R3350 engines and the general maintenance of the planes. I was surprised how much I learned about the engines while working on them. I ran into Lemuel Angus McWhorter from Chattanooga. His mother and Mom had corresponded and determined we were in the same Group. Angus was an armorer and we worked together when bombs and ammunition were loaded on #248. Shortly after getting to Piardoba, a large "C 1" was painted on our plane's tail fin for identification in the air.

Ross Briner, who had left Kansas with the ground personnel, arrived in Piardoba on May 15, and Lehwalder and Thomas arrived on the 20th. Ross had gotten to India all the way from the States by ship, arriving in Bombay, then by rail to our base. "Lee" and "Tommy" had gone from Kansas to Fort Patrick Henry in Virginia where they stayed for four weeks before being shipped by ship to Casablanca, Morocco. After a delay there, ATC flew them by C-54 to Cairo, then to Abadan, then Karachi with another delay, and finally to Piardoba on the 20th of May. On May 21, our first mail arrived on base, and I had a letter from Mom and Dad written on April 12, plus two letters from Barbara, both written in April.

Since our plane, #248, did not have an alternate crew assigned to it, we five enlisted men on our crew had to pull all the guard duty day and night. This meant our rotation came around pretty fast for each of us. It would have eased things a bit if the officers had helped with this duty. Even though Steen said he would see what could be done, nothing changed.

On May 25, we made an engineering flight to see if our work had stopped the proverbial oil leaks on the engines. We flew for 1:40 hours and found leaks cropping up again. The extreme heat of India was rough on the engines and the dust settling on the plexiglass blisters of all the sighting stations caused them to get scratched easily. Due to the heat, it was

impossible to work on the plane between noon and 1600 hours.

Again, we flew a practice mission on Friday, May 26, down into northern Burma, just over the area where the Japanese had spilled over into Western India at Imphal and Kohima. We saw a couple of fighters but they weren't close enough to determine whether they were Allied or Japanese. We were able to see artillery fire below us, but it was ground fire and none was directed our way. The flight lasted 3:30 hours and #248 ran well.

Briner, Green, and I built a desk out of ammunition boxes so we'd have a place to write. It took us a while to commandeer a bomb cradle which we figured would make us a good chair to go with the desk. Actually, it worked out well and we all used it.

On Thursday, June 1, Briner and I discussed the increased activity down in the bomb dump, plus the arrival of a convoy of trucks carrying ammunition boxes. Although nothing had been told us, there seemed a certain excitement in the air. Lehwalder came by the plane on the 2nd, telling us there was a mission coming up soon but he didn't know the location. All of us knew work was being done in China for our planes, but we understood those China bases weren't up to operational standards yet.

Angus McWhorter from Chattanooga was made armament crew chief for #248, and on June 3, he and his crew brought our .50 caliber ammunition and the 20 mm ammo for the tail cannon. Angus and I inspected the shells being loaded into the cans for all the turrets. Angus told me his order for our plane was 500 rounds per gun for the .50 caliber and a half load for the 20 mm in the tail. That meant we would carry 5,000 rounds of .50 ammo and 20 rounds for the 20 mm, all of it making a great deal of weight.

On June 4, 1944, the air crews in the Group were briefed on a mission to bomb the Makasan Railway Workshops and Marshalling Yards in Bangkok, Siam, on Monday, June 5, 1944. The bombs were brought to #248 and loaded into the bomb bays. It seemed our Group, the 462nd, was the only one to carry incendiary bombs, while the rest of the Wing carried demolition bombs. We carried 20 500 lb. bombs. For the size of the bomb bays, the load looked sparse with only 20 bombs, since we had shackles for 40. After bomb loading, I checked the CFC gunnery system in every way, except firing, and all turrets reacted as technically designed.

After being waked at 0430 on June 5, 1944, our crew and others crowded the mess hall

for breakfast. By a few minutes after 0515 hours, all of the enlisted men were at #248, rechecking all our equipment and all we gunners dropped the ammo links over the holding pawls on the .50s, then buckled the turrets down. I helped Green, our tail gunner, crank the ammo feed for the 20 mm into place and we felt ready to go. Steen, Weaver, Thomas, and Lehwalder were being given an up-to-date briefing on our expected weather and any changes in routing. The gas truck pulled up and topped off all our tanks, then we drained the sumps under the wings to clear any water in the gas from condensation. At about 0530, we pulled the props through to eliminate any air locks and waited for the signal to start our engines. At 0600 hours, we started the engines, starting with #1. Quickly, all four engines were up and running and the cylinder head temperature rose fast to their proper levels. The energy for starting the engines was supplied by the auxiliary power plant in the rear of the plane. With all fans turning, O'Malley cycled each prop to determine all prop governors were working. Steen and Lehwalder read out their check list and Thomas closed the bomb bay doors. On orders, we taxied from our revetment onto the taxi strip, being the sixth plane in line for takeoff. I was in my seat on top of the plane as we started to taxi, as my position offered the only 360° view of any obstacles around us and a full view of all four engines. At 0615 on June 5, 1944, we got the green light from the tower to take off on the first B-29 combat mission, the start of a long string of missions to be flown.

I was excited and, I guess, apprehensive, but that was what I was there for! As we started to roll, I got out of my seat and sat leaning against the bulkhead between our section and the rear bomb bay. The weather was hot with cumulus clouds building larger as we lifted off. Shortly after we turned on course to the south, Vicoy called on the intercom to say the radar was not operative!

As we broke out of the clouds, we set a course over the Bay of Bengal towards Bangkok, but we were unable to see our element lead plane ahead of us. Checking to see there were no planes near us, I turned on the power for the entire gunnery system. The turrets operated fine, so I called Steen for permission to test all our guns and he gave me clearance to go ahead. As I turned on the firing switch, .50s immediately started firing continuously, so I cut the switch. Checking, I found both upper turrets, which I controlled, were the ones firing without the trigger button on my ring sight being pressed. With a volt meter, I determined the trigger button on my ring sight was locked in a closed position. I got tools and dismantled the switch assembly finding there was grit from the dust at our base had wedged the spring of the button in a closed position. After cleaning and repositioning the spring, I notified everyone to test again. It was a relief when no guns fired when the firing

switch was snapped on.

On test firing the two upper turrets, all guns operated properly. I, then, had Tommy Thomas test fire the lower forward turret guns on primary control and then the upper forward turret guns on secondary control. After that, I had Mackinaw and Briner test the lower aft turret guns, then the lower forward on secondary control. Everything seemed to working well, so I asked Green in the tail to test his guns. The tail .50s fired about four rounds and jammed! Even trying to clear the jam by using the automatic gun chargers on the .50s did not work, so I left my seat, since we were out over the Bay of Bengal and not close to land, and went to the tail compartment. There wasn't much room there, so I had Green leave as I got into place. In order to reach the twin .50s, I had to remove an acess door of armor plate in order to slide into the turret area holding the guns. On inspection, I found both .50s were jammed apparently due to the bolts hitting the metal casting of the turret on recoil. There was no way of remedying the problem while in the air, since after I cleared the jam, they jammed again on firing. While I was there, I test fired the 20mm, and it worked flawlessly. Reporting to Steen, on my analysis of the problem, I buttoned up the turret, cut off the firing switch for the .50s, and returned to my position in the rear compartment. At least, we had the 20mm for protection in the tail. I thought we'd be all right with that.

On reaching our rendezvous point, we began to try to find our element's formation but were unable to locate our element leader's plane. Not knowing where he went, we fell in with the planes from the 769th formation, setting up in #4 position. As we approached the IP (Initial Point) in the Gulf of Siam to start our track towards the target to the north, our #4 engine oil cooler blew out all of its oil, causing Steen to feather the engine. The feathered engine induced drag, causing us to be unable to maintain the element's speed, so we had to drop back out of formation, continuing on towards the target alone.

Things aboard the plane got very quiet as we headed towards the target, but suddenly Tommy started excitedly yelling over the intercom. Due to his excitement, it took a split second to understand what he was saying. He was reporting there were fighters ahead. As I swung my sight, I picked up five Oscar Japanese fighters orbitting the target. Due to our being on only three engines running and one feathered, Steen rightly felt we were at a disadvantage and banked towards a buildup of clouds just as one of the Oscars peeled off and closed on us to about 900 yards. I was ranging in on the fighter and fired one short burst just as we ran into the cloud cover. Steen called Tommy telling him to salvo the bombs, which he did, since we had no radar. The feeling was that the bombs hit short of the target,

probably in the water, although we could not see the ground at that time.

Coming out of the clouds, we set a course for Piardoba which took us over the western border of Siam and touching a part of southern Burma. As we left the target area, O'Malley reported we had used more gas than expected due to the drag produced by the feathered engine. Realizing we'd have to nurse #248 across the Bay of Bengal to our home base, Steen told the crew to throw out any excess weight we had and to get rid of the ammunition which was so heavy. He brought the plane down to a low level which enabled the side gunners and Tommy in the nose to strafe any unmarked air fields enroute. As for me, I just shot my ammo into the air later after we got out over the water. We also threw out all flak vests and anything else loose. On the way to Piardoba, Dixie Schroen picked up a BBC radio broadcast on the short wave, reporting on the tremendous number of ships concentrating around Dover and Southampton, England.

Lehwalder later commented he seriously thought we would be shot down and either killed or interned by the Japanese after we spotted the Japanese fighters over the target area. Being on three engines and alone certainly made us very vulnerable.

With our gas tanks showing practically dry, we approached our field at Piardoba just as a storm with high winds rolled into the area, completely covering any view of the runway with dust. Knowing we had no fuel left, Steen slid to the right, getting permission to land at the British field about three miles from ours near Bishnipur. We set down there as the sun began to go down. We'd been in the air 12:00 hours and had less than 30-minutes of gas left in our tanks.

As could be expected, the British crowded around the plane as we rolled up to park. Shortly, a truck from our field came to pick us up, so we could get back to our own mess hall for dinner. We were glad to be back and hoped the next mission would be better than this first one. I learned later that Jim Drnek, my friend from CFC school and was with the 40th Bomb Group, had ditched in the Bay of Bengal on the way back from the target from lack of fuel, and four members of his crew had been killed. Jim told me they floated around for several hours before an air-sea rescue plane landed on the water to pick them up.

After debriefing, that evening produced much conversation as to who had seen what and the problems so many of us had due to one malfunction or another. Many of the problems concerned the R3350 engines and oil leaks, plus just plain blown cylinders. On this

first B-29 mission, 98 planes from the Wing had gotten off the ground from the four fields, 77 had gone to the target, and 5 planes were lost, all due to operational malfunctions. It was not a very good record, it seemed to me! Some planes reported some flak but we saw none.

Early in the morning at breakfast on June 6, one of the enlisted men, who was the bartender at the Officers' Club, pulled me aside to tell me of an incident that happened there at the Officers' Club the previous night. He said there was a lieutenant colonel from Wing Headquarters there and had made some nasty remarks about one of our Group's planes landing at the British field. Of course that was our plane, #248. The bartender told me Steen had gotten quite "loaded", and he came up behind the "light" colonel, spun him around, and hit him with full force on the jaw. As the "light" colonel tried to get up off the floor, Steen quietly walked out and went to bed. Up to the time the "light" colonel left our base to fly back to Kharagpur, he was trying to find out who had slugged him, but no one knew. That "morning after", I hesitated to mention it to Steen, but I understood there were many delighted people over what had happened to the "blow hard" from Wing Headquarters.

The afternoon of June 6, after repairing the oil cooler leak on #248 at the British field, we flew it back over to Piardoba without any other problems, but we had to refurbish the contents of the plane and replace those items we threw out coming home from the mission. Also, I had to install four guns barrels I'd burned out shooting up all the ammunition.

I think all available radios, including those in the planes, on the field were tuned to shortwave to pick up the reports of D-Day in Europe on June 6, 1944. The invasion sounded plenty rough since the weather there was so bad no fighters or bombers could fly to support the troops landing on the beaches in Normandy in France. Though all of us were thrilled that Europe was invaded, we knew we were in an entirely different war and we had a big job to do with a long way to go. To us, Europe was another world, many hours and countries away from us. We, also, were thankful we were in the air and not on the ground.

On Wednesday, June 7, the enlisted crew men, plus ground men, got down to checking everything in earnest on #248, from the engines, to the bomb racks, to the gunnery system. My main concern was the jams on the tail .50s on that last mission. Since I had identified that the gun bolts were jamming against the aluminum frame of the turret, Angus McWhorter and I took the .50s off their mounts, finding the scoring on the mounts' metal. From all indications, the mount was a bad casting when made; in that, the metal was not truly level. We used a cold chisel and hammer to chip away one-half inch of the metal, allowing the guns'

bolts to operate freely. After that effort and repair, we never had any further malfunctions with those guns.

Due to the gun problems on that first mission, I began to think if I could trust the new CFC system to take care of our crew against future fighter attacks. There were so many variables that could cause malfunctions and erratic operation. With that thought, I resolved to make certain our plane's gunnery system was properly set up in every way. Through the tests I put the CFC system through on #248, I knew everything was operating perfectly electrically. However, I mentally questioned whether the original mechanical installation at the factory in Wichita had been adequately checked. After all, the people at the factory had been under pressure to produce and deliver in a hurry a safe flying B-29 with all equipment in working order. My question was their concern deep enough to apply the time needed concerning the armament allignment which might have delayed the delivery of the plane from the production line?

Tracking down Lt. Jim Gillespie, the armament officer of the 768th, I laid out my feelings on the possible needs to harmonize the guns on our plane. He admitted he had not thought of the prospect and said he'd contact Group Headquarters regarding a check. I suggested I could harmonize the system without having to level the aircraft, but it would be better to do so. I suggested using the compass rose for the positioning of the plane with four poles at 90° from the plane at 300 yards across the open area of the field. This would put the sights and the guns parallel if all systems were correct.

By June 9, the project was approved and I met with a couple of the construction engineers still working on our taxi strips and revetments on the field. They ran the right angle from the compass rose and pinpointed where the poles would be set at 300 yards. Their men also constructed the panels to go on the poles for the sights and the gun bores. By the afternoon of the 10th, the engineers helped set the panels on the poles in direct relationship to the way the sights and guns existed on the plane. On the morning of June 11, we dragged #248 to the compass rose, positioning it with the nose at 360° and the tail at 180°

With the help of Briner and Mackinaw, we set a tail jack on the leveling pad near the tail skid and brought the plane into a level position, using a bubble level. The plane normally parked at a slightly tail low attitude, so the jack was necessary. With a portable generator, we were able to engerize the gunnery system, setting all sights and turrets at 90°, except the tail guns, and I locked the sights on the panels on the poles. Using a bore sighting tool, I was

able to check to see if the guns were exactly parallel to the sights. There was very little deviation but I used the volt meter to zero the current by turning the selsyns, bringing all guns and sights into proper alignment. Of course, all the corrections had to be done without the computers engaged in the system. By late afternoon, we turned the plane to check the tail system and followed the same procedure. With the bad casting on the tail turret, I had to install shims to get proper alignment, but we finished before mess. I was then confident the system was set up perfectly.

While we were getting all the CFC system properly harmonized, Colonel Kalberer, then deputy group commander, drove up, saying he had heard what I was doing and asked for information on exactly what was involved. I explained what harmonizing the components meant to the accuracy of the gunnery system. I demonstrated how a target could be competely missed even though the system was working properly if the sights and the gun turrets weren't harmonized. He asked many questions, saying he understood that the harmonizing not only gave the gunners accuracy but also prevented our own guns from shooting our own wing tips or the vertical tail assemby due to the contour cut off switches. He thanked me and left.

After that, Briner and I commented it seemed there was always a plane on the compass rose checking the alignment and harmonizing of the gunnery system. Often between missions, a plane could be seen checking. I guess we all felt more comfortable after the check, knowing the system was in the best shape we could put it. Several of the other CFC men dropped by to check on their procedure in doing the check.

For days, we had indications that something was brewing and everything pointed to the possibility our next mission would be from our advanced base in China. Ammunition was brought to the planes and the bomb dump was very active bringing 500 lb. demolition bombs to each plane. Also, the Group engineering officer kept a constant check on all planes as to their readiness to fly.

As background, the 20th Bomber Command, 58th Wing, had built four advance bases in China in the vicinity of Chengtu in western China. Each base had a letter and number designation to distinguish it rather than using the Chinese name of the village of location. Our Group, the 462nd, had a base built at Kiunglai (A5), while the 40th Group's field was at Hsinching (A1). The other two fields were built for the 444th Group at Kwanghan (A3) and the 468th Group's base at Penshan (A7).

The building of these fields was a monumental task, since they were constructed entirely by hand with over 100,000 Chinese coolies working on each field. The runways were 8,500 feet long to give us the necessary length to take off at that altitude with a rock surface. The thickness of the runways was 19" made of rounded rocks and gravel covered by crushed rock, sand, and clay with water, then rolled by large 6' concrete rollers pulled by up to 100 coolies to compact the mixture and smooth the surface. Thousands of coolies crushed the rocks with hammers to make the gravel. Each field also had taxi strips with 52 hardstands for parking the B-29s. Landings on these runways were awfully hard on the tires of the planes, as chunks of rubber would be knocked off when the tires met the rock surface.

The only road into that area of western China from India was the Burma Road which had been cut by the Japanese advances into northern Burma, so materials at our advanced bases were in short supply. Therefore, the 58th Wing had to fly whatever was needed into the bases in order for the B-29s to operate. Some B-29s were stripped of all armament and converted into tankers, carrying precious fuel to the China bases to be stockpiled. Also, 50 transport planes, C-46s, of the Air Transport Command (ATC) helped by carrying 55 gallon drums of 100 octane gas to the bases if they weren't too busy supplying the 14th Army Air Force bases also in China.

For security, there was a garrison of Chinese troops stationed on each field. At Kiunglai (A5), our field, the Chinese patrolled the entire area day and night. Their commander was an old colonel who had been fighting the Japanese since the 1930s. He had lost one eye on which he wore a black patch, plus his left arm seemed useless and his left leg was gimpy. The interpreter told me the colonel was a real character and took no foolishness from anyone, running his garrison with an iron hand.

By Wednesday, June 14, all planes at Piardoba were loaded with bombs and ammo, and all engines were checked out. There was a briefing for the officers who in turn told us enlisted men that we would be briefed after we got to China. We were told the mission would be staged out of A5 and it would be to Japan, but the exact location would not be told to us until we got to China.

The morning of Thursday, June 15, 1944, after breakfast we reported to #248 to head out for our first visit to our advanced base at Kiunglai (A5). At 0700 hours we started our engines and found the starter on #2 engine was inoperative, so we were delayed until we installed a new one. We finally took off at 0845 hours, heading on our route over the Hump.

Each Group in the Wing had its own particular route to its China base over the Himalaya Mountains, many of which were over 30,000 feet into the air. Our route was about 1200 miles over this very rugged terrain. Leaving Piardoba, we started our climb and passed over our first check point at Jorhat on the Brahmaputra River about 400 miles out at about 15,000 feet. Enroute to our second check point, Likiang, we traveled about 390 miles and gained altitude to 20,000 feet, turning to the northeast towards our base at Kiunglai for 410 miles and climbing to 26,000 feet. The trip took us 5:10 hours. Nearing the end of the flight, Schroen contacted Chengtu air traffic control by radio, and Chengtu ATC turned us over to A5 control.

The view over the Hump was breathtakingly beautiful and rugged! Snowcovered mountains of granite rose in majestic grandeur into the clear, blue sky without a level spot showing. Our check point at Likiang showed as a small patch of green amid all that rock and it was like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. In other words, Likiang seemed to be at the bottom of a hole. I often wondered how the men who operated the radio there ever got in and out after their six months stint there. In the first three months of our operation in that area, there were six B-29s lost by the Wing over the Hump.

As we cut our engines in a revetment at Kiunglai, it was 1400 hours. After the crew helped Tommy put the fuses in the bombs we carried, we headed for briefing. Takeoff was scheduled for 1630 hours, so we returned to the plane after a Life Magazine photographer took a picture of the crew members there. As we got back to #248, Lt. Col. Roscoe Norman came by the plane, saying our crew could not go on the mission since there wasn't enough time for our plane to be refueled. Our hearts sank! No one on the crew could understand how it was possible, since we had arrived over two hours in advance of takeoff time. Steen was livid and tried to talk Norman into letting us go, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. As the result, we watched the other planes leave for Yawata, Japan, to bomb the steel mills there. The code word, "Betty", came by radio from the target at 2338 hours, meaning the bombs had been dropped. By 0645 hours on June 16, the planes began to arrive back to the field. In the total Wing, of the 68 planes that got off the Chinese bases, only 47 got to the target, and 7 planes were lost, primarily due to mechanical problems.

We spent the day of the 16th on the base at A5, except we unloaded our bombs to be left there for future use, and we talked with those crews who had made the mission. Although we had enough gas aboard to go back to India, all the planes were held up until more gas was flown in, as total availability was very low. On the morning of the 17th, we flew the reverse of our Hump route back to Piardoba, still intrigued and fascinated with the raw beauty of the

majestic peaks and scenery of the Himalayas. We came back in 4:50 hours with #4 engine throwing oil but it was nothing to worry about.

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On June 20, our APO mailing address was changed from 493 to 220, giving our base at Piardoba its own number instead of being lumped with all the other B-29 fields, as had been the case.

For the next week, we tried to fine tune the engines and all the equipment on #248. We tightened the oil lines on #4 and even tried to wash the dust off the fuselage without results. The plane was so stained it continued to look dingy. On the afternoon of the 23rd, we decided to change the complete set of oil lines on #4 engine in hopes of eliminating all the oil leaks. On the 24th, we took the plane up for an engineering test hop and everything seemed to work well. In addition to working at the plane, we spent time digging new slit trenches near the barracks as protection for any air attacks even though we felt the possibility of an attack was remote.

At 0600, Wednesday, June 28, we took off on a "gas run" over the Hump to China in #248, counting on being back in Piardoba by late afternoon. Taking our assigned route, we again watched the fascinatingly beautiful Himalaya Mountains slip under us before running into a heavy cloud layer as we started our letdown into Kiunglai (A5). We arrived at 1130 hours and unloaded 1100 gallons of gas to be stored for future use. Since #4 engine had been cutting up a bit, we inspected it, finding a cracked cylinder on the top inner bank. That problem meant we had to stay at A5 until a new cylinder could be flown up to us. On the 29th, we spent the time removing the damaged cylinder and checking the other engines and systems. On the 30th, we went into the village of Liunglai, walking from one end to the other on the main street. The village was filthy with open toilets, "honey pots", consisting of parallel poles on which to sit while a bucket underneath would catch whatever anyone eliminated. The feces from the buckets was collected daily and used to fertilize the crops in the fields around the village. That method of fertilizing was responsible for our food in China from the local peasants having to be boiled to kill bacteria before eating. Also, the water had to be heavily chlorinated, as in India. The Chinese peasants were very friendly and always smiling. Their greeting was,

"Ding Hao", meaning "very good", and we returned the same. I bought a pair of silk stockings to be sent to Barbara later. The quality was horrible!

We installed the new cylinder on Saturday, July 1, ran up the engine, and took off from A5 in the afternoon, heading back to Piardoba. As we started our climb toward the Hump, the turbo on #4 engine went out. On contacting ATC, we were directed to land at A1 (Hsinching) which we did after 1:40 in the air. After waiting at A1 for a day to get the new turbo, we installed it and waited until July 3 to start again for India. We left A1 in the midmorning and everything was running well as we got into the peaks of the Hump. Suddenly, #4 engine lost all its oil and Steen had to feather the prop, turning around again to A5. To make matters worse, #1 engine started cutting out. That time we'd been in the air for 2:20 as we landed at Kiunglai (A5). We were beginning to think we were "snakebit".

Since the next day was Tuesday, July 4, the Chinese threw a big party for everyone on the base in celebration of our independence holiday. They served us roast pig, wine, and all the trimmings with a massive fireworks show. We were most appreciative, realizing how much effort they put into the celebration and how meager their resources were.

All day on July 5, we worked on #248, particularly the engines. A new set of magnetos was installed on #1 engine, and #4 got two new oil lines. We finished the work about sundown, so we took a nap befor reporting back to the plane. At 0200, early on the 6th, we took off over the Hump again. It was a beautiful, clear night over the Hump with moonlight shining on the mountain peaks. It was a real treat to see! We landed at Piardoba after 5:30 hours in the air, just in time for breakfast. We'd been gone nine days just making a simple "gas run". We all wondered when the R3350 engines would settle down!

The days got hotter in Piardoba, so Briner and I moved our cots onto the porch, hoping to catch any available breeze. It was so hot during the day that it was impossible to work on the plane between 1000 and 1600 hours. To remedy the heat, we worked primarily at night with lights, energized by a portable generator.

On July 14, we were told all four engines on #248 would be changed, since so many new modifications had been made on the R3350 engines. The new engines, all crated, arrived on July 17, and I was promoted to Staff Sergeant that day. It took two nights to get the cradles and hoists set up and to pull the old engines off the plane. Some of the units on the old engines had to be transferred for use on the new ones; such as, the exhaust stacks, wiring

harnesses, starters, and turbos. Of course, if there was any apparent damage on any of the reused units, they were replaced. By July 23, we had all four engines on the plane with all four propellers reattached and test runs had been made. On Monday, July 24, we flew for 1:10 hours to break in the engines and to see if any adjustments were necessary. For the balance of July, we spent our time tinkering with different items on the plane to make certain everything was ready to go when the time came.

On the last day of July, we were told our crew would have a three day pass, starting Tuesday, August 1, so we started figuring what money we had among us, as all of us had been sending what money we had home and keeping very little with us. As a staff sergeant with overseas and flight pay, I drew $172.80 per month, but after deducting the $125.00 allotment I was sending home, I was left with only $47.80 to spend each month. That figured out to about 217 rupees. Green was complaining he had no money and asked Mackinaw if he would make him a loan. Mac said he didn't have any extra but turned to me in front of Green and said he could loan me a couple of hundred rupees if I needed them. As could be expected, Green blew up and left the barracks swearing.

The morning of August 1, we caught the train to Calcutta which took about five hours. The train ride was stop and go all the way as it seemed everyone in India used the rails for their transportation. On getting to Calcutta, we enlisted men went to the Red Cross to find a place to sleep, while the officers went to the Grand Hotel, reserved for their ranks. Briner, Schroen, Mackinaw and I got beds at the Great Eastern Hotel while Green went off on his own to "shack up" with someone.

Even though Calcutta was filthy, we were in a good section of the city and not far from places we wanted to go and probably the best hotel we could find. We were on Old Court Road and not far from Chowringhee High Road, the prime street in the city. The large buildings were old with no windows on the ground floor, leaving the appearance of an old fortress. Dad's brother, Eddie, lived in Calcutta where he was the Director of the Imperial Tobacco Company, a subsidiary of the British-American Tobacco Company out of London, England. I didn't get to see Eddie on this pass, as he was on leave in the States. However, he had given me the names of some of his friends at his company. When I went by his office, I met Mr. Winders, Mr. Bell, and Mr. Cornish. Mrs. Cornish took me to lunch the next day which was most gracious of her. Although she was English, she'd lived with her husband in India for many years. I enjoyed the lunch and was intrigued by her English accent and terminology.

Eddie had a suite at the Bengal Club, since he had sent his wife, Mary Rives, and his son, Preston, home to Farmville, Virginia, when war seemed eminent in 1941. We enlisted men, without Green, took in the sights of Calcutta by a bus tour from the Red Cross building. All the buses there ran on charcoal with the burners mounted on the back because gasoline was so rationed. On the tour we went to the Victoria Museum, then afterwards we went shopping in an area of what seemed thousands of booths. Ross and I bought a large ice cream freezer, since we had spotted some ice cream mix cans in our PX on base. All of us were shocked by the number of people sleeping on the streets, day and night. One of the movie houses was showing "Stormy Weather" with Lena Horne, so we went to that, only to find that the movie had subtitles in English. As the result, we left before it was over. On August 3, we caught the train at Howrah Station back to Piardoba, lugging our freezer and feeling rested from a break in our usual routine. Green met us at the train station and looked like he'd been dragged through a keyhole. He slept on the train all the way back to base!

Back at Piardoba, we fell back into our usual routine at the plane and our rotation of two of us enlisted men staying with the plane nightly, even though there was a Gurkha soldier on guard at the same time. We had to be careful of the Gurkha guards because they would steal anything left lying loose, although they were cheerful people. In addition to their rifles, the Gurkhas always carried their razor sharp, curved knives about eighteen inches long. We were told to become a Gurkha warrior, the man had to be able to sever the head of a cow in one stroke of the knife.

On August 5, we got "Lightning", our houseboy, to go to Bishnupur to buy rock salt, and Briner and I picked up two cans of the ice cream mix at the PX. Early that morning, Ross and I went to the train station at Piardoba when the train from the north came in. While the train was taking on water for its boiler, we found the train master and bribed him to break the seal on the ice car door and paid him the equivalent of $5.00 per 10-pound block, each wrapped in a burlap sack. We bought six sacks. When "Lighning" got back from Bishnupur with the salt, we poured the mix in the freezer can with water and packed ice around the can. Since I had two cans of cocktail mix, sent me by Barbara's grandmother, Nana, I poured that into the mix and someone else had a can of peaches that went in. After capping, we tooks turns churning the paddles which caused the mixture to get thicker as time went by. Near the end, it took two of us to crank the paddles. When we opened the can, we each had a canteen cup and invited others to join us. We'd sent word to the officers on the crew and I think most of them showed up. During our eating, Col. Kalberer drove up to get a canteen cup full. By the time we'd dished out five gallons of the ice cream, we were all full. Whether the ice cream was good or

not didn't matter, it was cold and we thought it was good. Everyone talked about the feed for several days, and Briner and I figured that five gallons of ice cream cost us about $18.00 per gallon, but it was worth it.

On August 7, we loaded three bomb bay gas tanks in the front bomb bay and one tank at the top of the aft bomb bay, being told we would need those tanks on an upcoming mission. We also loaded 320 rounds of .50 caliber ammo for each gun and 40 rounds for the 20 mm in the tail. I complained to Jim Gillespie, the armament officer, that we wanted at least 500 rounds for the .50s, but he said his mission order called for only 320.

On the next day, the 8th, were were briefed for a trip to a place called China Bay, Ceylon, near a city called Trincomalee. Ceylon was an island off the southeast coast of southern India. At the briefing, it was explained the rear bomb bay would be empty on this flight, as we would receive our bomb load after arriving at China Bay. The officers were briefed on the entire mission but all the enlisted men were told only that there would be a long mission from Ceylon on the 10th.

The morning of Wednesday, August 9, we left Piardoba for China Bay. We crossed over the coast of India into the Bay of Bengal on a direct flight. Charles Weaver, our navigator, who gave Steen our heading apparently made an error. After flying for five hours, Vicory, our radar man, picked up Ceylon on his scope which showed Ceylon well to our west. Turning west, we flew two more hours to China Bay. For what should have been a flight of slightly over five hours ended up taking us seven hours. The British navy gave us a fine place to bunk and served us Australian beef for dinner. It was the first fresh meat we'd had since leaving the States. Two naval mines were loaded into our rear bomb bay. All our wing tanks were refueled and the four bomb bay tanks and the center wing tank were topped off. Since there were ripe stalks of bananas available, Briner and I got two stalks, putting one in the front of the plane and one in the rear compartment.

On the morning of Thursday, August 10, I went to the plane to check the gunnery system and found a U.S. naval officer setting up the two mines in the aft bomb bay. He was pushing buttons and counting the number of "clicks" as the internal battery in the mines ran electric motors within each one. He explained every mine in the planes carrying them was set differently, so after the mines were dropped, the mine would count the number of ships passing over it. That was meant to destroy one ship for each mine dropped in the Moise River which ran through Palembang, Sumatra.

After briefing, we got set for takeoff for Palembang, Sumatra, at 1645hours. There were 56 B-29s from the Wing on the field but two planes had mechanical problems and were grounded while 56 took off. Our 462nd Group planes were the only ones carrying mines to be laid in the Moise River, while the others were to hit the Pladjoe Oil Fields and Refinery. The runway at China Bay was built to accommodate both land based and amphibian aircraft, meaning the runway ran completely into the water on the eastern end. The heavily loaded B-29s, trying to use as much length as possible, often almost dragged the tail guns in the water as the wheels left the runway due to the nose coming up.

We watched the sun set and manned only the side blisters as we knew we'd be over water for so long. Being in the rear compartment of #248, I swapped with Briner and Green swapped with Mackinaw each hour. I occasionally climbed into my seat on top just to check around and have a look at the engines in the moonlight. I could see the red glow of the collector exhaust rings of each engine. We all ate bananas and threw the peels out through the camera hatch in the rear. We test fired all our guns and took short naps to pass the time.

After 9½ hours of flying without seeing land, Vicory called on the intercom to report he was picking up what looked like the southern part of Sumatra and the northern part of Java on the 200-mile range on his radar scope. There was quite a discussion among Steen, Weaver, and Vicory about our heading. Weaver decided he'd given a wrong heading, so Steen turned on a new heading to the northwest with O'Malley saying we'd reached our "point of no return" based on the amount of fuel we had left in the tanks. Since we did not have enough fuel for us to swing back to Palembang to drop our mines and still have enough gas to get back to China Bay, Steen told Tommy to salvo the mines on the west coast of Sumatra. It was obvious Weaver, our navigator, had messed up again - big time! On direction from Steen, Dixie Schroen broke radio silence asked "in the clear" for help from any submarine in the area. We had been told submarines would be stationed in the area to pick up any crew having to ditch. Some sub responded and gave Dixie a QDM which was a fix on our location. This information was turned over to Weaver who calculated our route back to China Bay.

Figuring our amount of gas left, it was determined we did not have enough to reach China Bay, as the guages and cruise control showed we couldn't make it, so we started making preparations for ditching. To lighten the load, we fired 3200 rounds of ammo into the ocean, threw out everything we could , and pulled the life raft near the rear access door, then we waited. Steen radioed China Bay while we were about 300 miles out, telling them of our problem. It seemed the call put the British navy into action. At about a hundred and fifty

miles from base, we saw a British destroyer beneath us, and as we passed over it, we were able to see another one along our route on the horizon. As we approached the second destroyer, two Beaufort fighters flanked us. Shortly, pickets boats appeared along our route and the Beauforts stayed with us. Steen put our descent on two feet per minute letdown towards China Bay. With the fuel guages showing nothing and cruise control calculations giving "zero", we expected to ditch at any time. Our spirits were raised as we could see China Bay ahead, but #1 and #4 engines began to cut out just as we were about to touch down. As #248 rocked back on landing on the runway, #2 and #3 quit also. A cleetrack towed us off the runway. We were all ready to kill Weaver! From my timing, we'd been in the air 19:55 hours. We could never figure how many miles over the 4,030 scheduled miles we'd flown, but it was plenty. It was well just short of 1300 hours on August 11 when we got back.

After locking down #248 and being debriefed, we all went back to our barracks and hit the sack. We were worn out! I know Schroen woke us up in time for chow at about 1800. After eating, we talked awhile rehashing the mission with other crews and went back to bed again. Before we went to the plane on the next morning, August 12, we were told of the 54 planes that took off on the mission, 12 aborted enroute and returned to China Bay, 3 dropped bombs on alternate targets, and 39 got to the target. Only 8 of the planes of our Group, the 462nd, laid their mines in the Moise River. Apparently, we were counted as one of the planes that bombed an alternate target, as there were only 10 scheduled to carry mines. Getting ready to return to Piardoba, we found the starter on #3 engine was inoperative. Rather than wait to replace it, we cranked the flywheel by hand and got the engine running, and we took off. In five hours, we settled onto the runway at Piardoba, the end of quite an adventure, but a non-productive one. Almost immediately after returning, Lt. George L. Clark replaced Weaver as navigator and Bill Curran replaced Vicory as radar man. We applauded the changes.

On August 15, I noticed a small knot coming up on the right side of my forehead. By the 17th, it had gotten quite large but with no head on it. By the 18th, my flight helmet wouldn't fit over the swelling, so I went to see Doc Dyer, the flight surgeon who had flown with us on our trip overseas. After his examination, Doc checked me into the base hospital. He said I had an abcessed wen which needed to be surgically removed. At the hospital, a Major Maggani took me into the operating room where he was assisted by S/Sgt. Bob Rossett, who had prevously worked with Doc Dyer. Rossett was a third year medical student when he enlisted in service. Maggini said he was going to lance the wen by cutting top to bottom, but Rossett argued it should be lanced horizonally. I lay there through the discussion until Maggini told Rossett to do it if he thought his procedue was right. Rossett asked me if I had any objections and I had

none, so he made the slit. All kinds of pus and fluid flooded out, relieving the pressure I'd been feeling. Maggani took a look at the incision and admitted Rossett was right, and he left the room for Rossett to clean up and dress the wound. Maggani said he wanted me to stay in the hospital for a couple of nights until the drainage stopped. In the middle of the first night, the drainage popped out all over me and my bed but there was no pain. I was allowed to back to the squadron during the day but I had to report back to the hospital to sleep at night. I was released from the hospital on the morning of the 20th.

On the night of August 20, Steen threw a party for the crew. He'd gotten a quart of brandy and one of bourbon, plus some fruit juice for me to drink. Briner, who never drank anything stronger than beer, got "stewed", so Lehwalder and Steen had to drive him back to the barracks. It was good for the entire crew to get together for more than just flying. As Mackinaw said it was nice to know the officers were human. Steen got more jovial with the crew and even wanted to wrestle with me, saying he had to practice so he could whip Lehwalder. Even Green got to feeling no pain and let his language get somewhat out of line, but no one took offense to it. Dixie Schroen got a bit sullen, expressing his concern about his young daughter whom he never seen wasn't growing any hair yet. All in all, everyone enjoyed themselves, and I always felt it did a lot to cement the crew.

We weren't scheduled for the mission staged out of China on the 20th. The mission had been to Yawata, Japan, for the third time and was a daylight one. Our Group was led by Col. Richard Carmichael, our Group Commander, and he was shot down over the target. (At the end of the war, Col. Carmichael was released from a POW camp, having been captured and interned during that mission.)

A load of mail came in on the 22nd, making a great day for us. I had a letter from Warren Gardner, my boyhood friend, saying he was to be commissioned as a navigator. Another letter came from Cliff Beasley, my W&L roommate, saying he was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, waiting to be shipped overseas. Two letters from Barbara really perked up my spirits.

On Tuesday, August 28, 1944, Major General Curtis E. LeMay took over command of the XX Bomber Command from Brig. Gen. Kenneth Wolfe, who was an engineering officer. Gen. LeMay came to the 20th from the 8th Army Air Force in England where he had made his mark by his ideas on strategic bombing with the B-17s.

On the afternoon of the 28th, we took #248 up for an engineering hop after replacing some oil lines for about 45 minutes, then on the 29th after some additional repairs, we flew for 1:20 hours. About that time, we were told Janie Thomas, Tommy's wife, had delivered a son. Lehwalder told Tommy he didn't think he could do it!

On September 4, demolition bombs and ammunition started being delivered and loaded to #248. After a critque on the necessity of the 20mm cannon in the tail, it was decided to remove it. Since the 20mm and its ammunition was quite heavy and with all that weight far out from the balance point of the plane, it was a liability on takeoffs, as shown in the China Bay situation. By the removal, additional fuel and/or bombs could be carried. Actually, two men swinging on the 20mm barrel could lift the nose wheel off the ground, indicating the law of physics based on the location of the fulcrum on the point of balance. The next day, we ran up the engines and checked the entire gunnery system after being notified we would go to Kiunglai (A5) in China the following day.

Towards the end of August, I had developed what seemed a boil on the back of my neck, making my head push forward and stiffening my whole neck. I checked with Dr. George Dyer, our flight surgeon. He said he would lance it, but he wanted to bring it to a head first. He and Rossett, who had come back from the base hospital, spent all morning putting hot compresses on the area until the boil rose to a head. Doc Dyer picked the top off and the pus flowed out giving me immediate relief. As he cleaned around the hole made, he said I had a carbuncle and he pulled six more cores out of the hole. He dusted the wound heavily with sulfa and had me report daily for dressing and medication. When I told him I was scheduled to go to Kiunglai for a mission, he said it looked like he would have to ground me. He said the carbuncle wound was still draining and the infection was right on my spinal cord, making it dangerous for high altitude flying. I begged him not to ground me, since it would mean I would fall behind my crew in missions. After a few minutes of thought, he said I could go to China, but he would go with us to dress the wound before takeoff on the upcoming mission.

The following morning on September 6, we left Piardoba for the Hump trip to Kiunglai (A5) with Doc Dyer aboard. The weather over the Himalayas was heavy clouds, meaning we had to climb higher than normal and we weren't able to see the beautiful scenery we'd become accustomed to. On the check in with ATC at Chengtu, we had to wait a short time before being cleared to switch to radio contact with A5 landing control. It took us 5:30 hours to make the trip over. We spent all day on the 7th around the plane and were briefed in late afternoon for the mission to Anshan, Manchuria, to hit the Anshan Showa Steel Works. We were told

the reason we didn't make the mission on the 7th was due to the heavy cloud cover obscuring the target and clear weather was expected on September 8.

On Friday, September 8, after Doc Dyer dressed my wound, we took off from A5 at 0642 and fell into a four-plane formation with three other B-29s. From takeoff, our #1 engine threw oil and smoked, and that kept up for the entire mission. The weather was clear all the way. About the time we crossed the Yellow River, Tommy became so excited on the intercom that we had a hard time understanding that there was a fighter coming in high into the nose. The Oscar was one of five ahead, and it dove through our formation before anyone spotted it. The fire from the Oscar hit the number three plane in their #3 engine, so that B-29 had to turn around to head back to base. As things turned out, the damaged plane made a forced landing on a fighter strip where it was strafed and destroyed. Our three-plane formation continued towards the target crossing Po Hai Bay to the IP where we could see the fighters' vapor trails circling Anshan. At first, the flak was below us but it found our altitude about the time we dropped our bombs on the coke ovens. Some of the bursts were close enough for me to see the red center in the explosions, but even though some flak rattled off our plane's skin, we didn't get punctured. A Japanese Hamp fighter started an attack on us but turned off before getting into range. I guessed the flak would have been considered as moderate. As we again crossed over Po Hai Bay, heading home, I counted eight small ships which seemed to be scurrying in all directions, probably thinking we had a bomb left for them. The rest of the trip back to A5 was uneventful and we landed at 1812. We'd been in the air for 11:30 hours. The first person to come to the plane was George Dyer to clean the drainage and dress the wound on my neck. After debriefing, we headed for the mess hall.

After dinner, night had fallen and Lehwalder and I walked from the tent area down to the line where the planes were just as the sirens went off, indicating a pending air raid. Since the Chinese garrison had guards all over the field, we kept calling "Mequa Bing" ("American Soldier") so the guards wouldn't shoot at us. Lee and I sat on the edge of a drainage ditch, so we could jump for cover if bombs came down. Watching, we saw what looked like a Japanese Betty, a twin engined bomber, come over Kiunglai and line up straight down our runway, but no bombs were dropped. Since we had no antiaircraft guns on the field, the only firing at the bomber was done by the Chinese soldiers with their old rifles. Lee and I discussed the lack of protection and wondered if it was obvious to the Japanese that we had none.

We fully expected to return to Piardoba on the 9th, but orders came down that no plane could leave until enough gas was ferried up to our field, since fuel supplies were too low on the

base. Since the gas was slow getting to us, our field commander called the 14th Air Force to get a movie for our troops stranded there. Twice in the next four days, an old stripped P-40 flew in to deliver us a film for entertainment while barrels of gas arrived to buiild our supplies. On the second trip in, the P-40 came in on August 11 while Briner and I watched the old fighter flair out to land with its wheels up. The P-40 hit the runway on its belly and skidded to a stop as Ross and I ran to it. The lieutenant flying the plane crawled out and sat down on the wing, doubled up with laughter. He said he knew the gear indicator lights didn't work but he'd forgotten it since he was too busy listening to music on his aircraft radio. A truck came down and dragged the old P-40 off to the dump. On the 12th, the Chinese had a celebration since they had been able to have a second harvest that year. About midday on the 13th, we finally gassed up with enough fuel and flew back to Piardoba, taking 5:25 hours enroute. Doc Dyer said he never expected to be gone a week when he rode to China with us.

After the Anshan mission, operations began to change as General LeMay set up his agenda. A status report was posted on every B-29 in the Group daily. Also, the flight characteristics of each plane were developed, giving a profile to determine how each plane operated and what the fuel consumption was to be applied against the average. With that information, one B-29 might be able to carry less fuel and more bombs over the same distance, while another plane might show the reverse to be true. The idea was to obtain the best effeciency for each individual B-29. Preventative maintenance was stressed and each crew member was to immediately report any deviation from the norm on his position, giving Group Engineering the opportunity to see if the same malfunction was occurring on more than one plane. One improvement initially made was to change the bomb bay doors from being operated by electric motors with a screw system to a new system of being operated by compressed air which could pop the doors open fast and slap them shut immediately after the bombs were dropped. This modification alone helped the plane gain speed faster, instead of having to overcome the drag from the slow closure of the doors.

A further development of General LeMay's agenda was the reducing from four squadrons in each group to three squadrons. That change was apparently brought on by several circumstances that became evident. Several of the original crews had either been rotated back to the States to serve as instructors for new crews, or had been lost in combat or primarily mechanical accidents due to the newness of the plane. These losses coupled with the inability of the needed number of B-29s coming off the production lines to meet the replacement needs made it necessary to make the change. Further, another wing, the 73rd Wing, was being formed in the States, and it needed planes. Therefore, our Group squadrons

reduced to the 768th, 769th, and the 770th. As this change took place, the word came down to emphasize the squadron losses. Fortunately, our 768th was the lowest of the group with 55% losses, while the 769th had 61% losses. The original 770th had 79% losses and the 771st had 67%. Actually the 770th was merged into the 771st which was redesignated as the 770th. Whatever the reasons, as indicated, the losses were much too high, but I guessed it was the price to pay for the development of a new aircraft.

On September 21, we flew practice formation and bombing runs over the mouth of the Hooghley River for 3:30 hours. Each time we made the run, the formation got tighter and tighter. From my position, I felt if we stayed up long enough, all the wings of the formation would be overlapping, as I could see the entire formation and how close each plane was flying to each other.

That night, the enlisted men went to a movie, and before the film started, the Hindu workers on the base put on a show for us. Since no women were allowed to dance, the men performed a dance with only one string instrument as their music. It was interesting and their rhythm was good, but the music was like being out of darkest Africa.

We weren't scheduled for the mission on September 26 which was going back to Anshan, but several of the crews in our squadron were. As was the usual procedure, the planes were loaded with bombs without fuses in Piardoba and flew to Kiunglai in China. On the morning of the 25th, Ross Briner and I watched as Lt. McCollum's crew with our friend, Gaylord "Tommy" Thompson, as radio man, taxied out and took off. Just as the plane, #506 (42-63506 made in Marietta.), lifted off , its #2 engine broke into flame. The plane banked left, hit the ground just off the field, and exploded. Everyone aboard was killed immediately, shocking everyone on the field.

Also, that same day, while crews were loading to go to A5, Lt. Harold Flowers, a bombadier, was checking his .45 pistol before takeoff and shot a hole in the top of his plane, "Dauntless Dottie". This incident caused him to receive a great deal of kidding and the story of the episode never left him throughout his career.

On Sunday, October 1, two C-46 cargo planes came to Piardoba and picked up about sixty of us men of the 768th to serve as an honor guard with the caskets of those killed on McCollum's crew. We flew to the 20th Bomb Command cemetery at Kalikunda. The heat was oppresive with high humidity and several of the men passed out. Everyone was queezy

from the smell of death with blood dripping from the bottoms of the wooden caskets. It was a very subdued bunch on the flight back to Piardoba.

We spent our days of October 2 and 3, checking the engines and doing preventative maintenance, trying to be certain all systems were in order. With the help of Angus McWhorter and his armament crew, we loaded 35 500-pound bombs in the bomb bays of #248 in late afternoon of the 3rd. After being fueled on the morning of the 4th, we headed for A5 to deliver the bombs there for future use out of China. The weather over the Hump was loaded with heavy clouds with only the highest peaks poking through the clouds into the clear, blue sky. The clouds below us looked so soft and fluffy I felt I could get out to walk on them. It took us 5:20 hours to set down at Kiunglai, and by the time we unloaded the bombs, it was too late for us to head back to India. The temperatures at Kiunglai were dropping and the nights were getting quite cool, particularly at this time with a drizzle of rain. The morning of the 5th, we loaded up and got off the ground in the rain, climbing through the heavy cloud layer until we broke into the sunlight as we got into the Hump. Getting into the bright sunlight took some of the chill off our feelings at Liunglai. It took us 5:40 hours to get back to Piardoba and warmer weather.

We finally got a rest on the 7th, and on October 8, we had a class on procedures, a part of LeMay's agenda. On the 8th, we were told our next mission would be staged out of A5, so on the 9th we loaded 32 demolition 500 lb. bombs and a full load of ammo aboard #248. Also, since we had never come up with a name to be painted on #248, we threw out several ideas along that line. We talked about possibly getting "Green Dragon" put on after the upcoming mission.

Late that afternoon, there was a band of refugees from the floods in southern India coming though our barracks area, begging for work or handouts. They were a pitiful lot. From what we could learn, they had lost their homes and all belongings in the heavy floods in the southern part of the country. Mackinaw and I talked about their dress, since some of the women seemed to be dressed in rather nice saris but were very worn. Out of feeling for them, nearly everyone gave them some money and let them shine shoes. It seemed the bunch was a cut above the lowest level in the caste system in India, plus most of them spoke English, of course, with a British accent. One of the men told me he was an English teacher in his village school and he hoped to be able to return to that position when the floods left. He had his wife and child with him on this trek. At the mess hall and that night in the barracks, the general talk was about the plight of those people who had come into the base.

The morning of October 10 at 1000 hours was hot and sultry as we taxied out in #248 for takeoff to go to A5 in China. We weighed 135,000 pounds, the heaviest we'd ever been for takeoff. We were given the green light from the tower to start rolling, so I left my seat, as was normal procedure. Right at lift off, Mackinaw reported #1 engine smoking badly and showing signs of fire, and being seated next to him, I looked through the left blister and saw #1 streaming smoke and fire. O'Malley came on the intercom reporting we were losing rpm (revolutions per minute) on #1 and the oil pressure was dropping fast. We were too low to open the bomb bay doors to try to jettison our bombs and too low to consider bailing out, so Steen banked left while adding power to the other three engines and feathering the prop on #1. In a flash, I thought of what had happened earlier to McCullum's crew! Being so heavy and wanting to maintain flying speed to keep from stalling, Steen came across the runway threshold much faster than normal and touched down onto the runway. As all our weight settled, the left inboard tire blew out and almost immediately the outboard blew on the same gear, dragging us towards a drainage ditch along the runway on the left. Steen tried to lock the brakes on the right gear to blow the tires on that side, but only one tire would blow. By giving full right rudder, he was able to hold #248 on the runway long enough to miss the end of the drainage ditch, but the left gear dropped off the pavement, sinking into the dirt, spinning us 90°, and sliding us sideways out into the open field. The crash crew were racing down the runway behind us. The landing gear dug a trench like a plow, shearing off the radar dome. As #248 came to a stop, the distance from the rear hatch to ground was less than two feet, so we in the aft compartment just stepped out and ran like hell! Those in the front of the plane had more problems getting out of the windows, but O'Malley was seen running to the edge of the field. The crash crew put the fire out, but we knew old #248 with the red tail and the big C1 on the tail was finished. We had been less than 10 minutes since we started takeoff, but it seemed a lifetime. Only Schroen got a scratch on his forehead as he climbed out while the rest of us just got scared! We just felt lucky to be walking away from #248!

Dejected at not having a plane for the upcoming mission, we went to Operations, giving information on what led to the wrecking of #248. Each of us was interviewed for what we saw and how the plane reacted when #1 engine was lost. We were still at Operations at noon when a new B-29, #42-63393, came in from the States. It was a real beauty with the new 4-gun upper forward turret and was all shiny. Steen and the rest of us pleaded with Lt. Col. Roush to let us have the plane to replace #248. After some thought, he said we could have it temporarily. He also said he'd just gotten information that the mission from China had been delayed until the 14th. Of course, we asked if we could take #393 to China and make the mission. After confering with the Engineering Officer, he told us we could go, provided all four

engines on #393 could be changed to the newer tactical model engines and all other systems checked out all right.

Since all other planes in the Group had already left for China, we had the services of all the ground mechanics on the base. Hoists from all over the field rolled to #393 and work started the morning of the 11th removing the old engines from the plane. I started checking the CFC gunnery system, correcting three minor problems, all having to do with loose connections and one poor soldering job on an amplifier connection. Since I wanted to harmonize the guns and turrets with the sights, as I had done on #248, I had to contact both the engineering officer and the armament officer to level the plane. Realizing it wouldn't interfere with the engine installations, I was able to get #393 level shortly after sundown on the 11th. Early on the 12th, I was back at the plane and found the mechanics had worked all night in shifts, getting the engines ready to be swung onto the plane early in the day when the weather wasn't so hot. I bore sighted all guns with the sights and made the necessary adjustments so I felt satisfied the gunnery system was ready to go by late in the afternoon. I ordered ammunition for all , now 12, .50 caliber guns. By dark, all engines were in place and I started with the armorers loading the ammo cans in each turret for each gun, while 32,500lb. general purpose demolition bombs were lifted into the bomb bays. Everything went smoothly with the loading, and I had saved the upper forward turret until last since few of the armorers had ever loaded a 4-gun turret. As I looked at the cans in the new upper forward turret, I realized with a shock that the ammunition cans in that turret had been installed at the factory backwards! As the cans were installed, there was no way the belts of .50 ammo could feed the guns. When I notified Jim Gillespie, the armament officer, of the installation error, he damned near fainted! I told him I would have to have a hoist to pull the turret, so he set into motion what I needed to correct the problem. It was well after midnight when I got the turret pulled and the cans properly installed, the leveling rechecked, and ammunition loaded. By the time I removed the leveling jack and buttoned up the cover on the turret, the mechanics had the new engines ready to run up. It was 0400 on the 13th, as I watched all four "fans" turning and being powered up. Gay Reed, our crew chief, said everything operated well and no oil leaks appeared. Since our takeoff for China was scheduled for 0600, Bill Brown drove me back to my barracks where I showered, changed into my flight clothes, grabbed a quick breakfast with the rest of the crew, and went back to #393 for the flight to China. Steen let me crawl into the tunnel and sleep until we started our letdown for A5 at Kiunglai. We took 6:00 hours to fly over the Hump, since the four new engines had to be "slow timed" as we made the Hump trip.

After grabbing some lunch at A5, we went back to #393 to check for any problems and

oversee the fuel loading. After evening mess, we went to briefing for the mission to the aircraft factory and modification center at Okayama, Formosa, the next day, Saturday, October 14, 1944. As soon as possible after briefing, we all went to our tents, and I was asleep by the time I hit the cot.

We were aroused out of a deep sleep at 0445 on the morning of the 14th. After breakfast, we enlisted men went to #393, while the officers from the front of the plane went to a last minute briefing on the weather and conditions over the target. After topping off the fuel tanks and draining the sumps, we pulled the props through and started the engines at 0630. We taxi d into the line of other planes and got the green light for takeoff at 0647. From our field, 29 planes got off the ground out of the 31 which had flown up from India.

About 200 miles enroute, we passed over Chungking, the capital of Nationalist China, which was partially hidden by clouds. At the China coast just north of Amoy, we climbed through the "soup" to form our element for the run to the target. The weather cleared over Okayama, and as the bombs dropped on the target, Briner reported the bombs went straight into the AP (Aiming Point). Flak was light and no fighters challenged us. With the dropping of the bombs, #393 was no longer a virgin! The trip back to base was uneventful, and we landed at A5 after 10:30 hours in the air. On the ground, Green located only two small flak holes in the horizonal stablizer, nothing important.

On the 15th, after checking over #393, refueling the plane, and supervising the reloading of 32 more bombs into the bomb bays, we were able to rest until dinner. After dinner, before going to our tents, Lehwalder and I walked down to the mess tent near the planes for a cup of hot tea. While we dicussed the mission of the 14th and the upcoming one the next morning, George Clark came by to tell Lee that his daughter had been born. Lee said her name was Julie. Knowing that Lee's wife, Polly, was expecting, the whole crew had been sweating out the delivery. After giving Lee congratulations, we wandered back to our tents and hit the sack for a good night's sleep before heading out again to Okayama.

On Monday, October 16, we were scheduled to report to #393 at 0300 hours, but the CQ missed waking us until 0510. We missed breakfast and ran to the plane. Steen raked us over the coals for being so late, and I don't think he believed us when we told him about the CQ not waking us. As we got there, we went through the usual procedures for starting out on a mission. We got off the ground at 0610 and climbed through the soup again. As on the 14th, we formed our elements at the China coast, then crossed the Formosa Straits towards

Okayama again. The target was the same as on the 14th, the aircraft factory and modification center. Things were peaceful as we turned on the IP and what flak there was was light but accurate. Tommy let the bombs go into the target, and Ross Briner, looking out of his blister, reported seeing the bomb hits in the center of the target area. Ross said we really flattened the place. As we turned away to head back to base,we spotted fighters waiting for us. The first fighter, a Zeke, made an attack, coming in at 2 o'clock low and Tommy got a quick shot at it, and Mackinaw picked it up and threw a burst at it, as it turned off. The second came in from 2 o'clock high, giving me a shot as it raced past us. Another attack from 7 o'clock level but he turned off as Green and Mackinaw both threw lead at it. The last plane started in from ll o'clock high. My six upper guns picked it up and my tracers seemed to be striking true but all I could get was a lot of smoke and pieces coming off the fighter as it went past us and turned for home. Another Zeke pulled out high ahead of us and dropped a phosphrous bomb at the formation, but it went off below us. On that attack, Harry Greene, right gunner on Kolander's crew and one of our barracks mates, was hit in the leg by the fighter's fire. The rest of the trip back to A5 was without trouble and we landed after 10:00 hours in the air. At our base at Kiunglai, Harry Greene was given medical treatment and eventually sent back to the States. On the 17th, we flew back to Piardoba in 5:45 hours.

After cleaning our guns and checking #393 for maintenance on the 18th, on the 19th we went back over the Hump on a supply run, carrying 38, 500lb. bombs to be left at A5 for future use. The weather over the Hump was cloudy below us with the tall peaks poking through. Due to the cloud cover at Kiunglai, we had to make an instrument letdown, slowing us down and making the trip over last 6:00 hours. Since it was late afternoon after unloading the bombs, we spent the night and returned to Piardoba on the 20th encountering the same lousy weather we had on the trip over. As gasoline was so precious at A5, we hadn't taken on any, so we nursed #393 coming back against a slight headwind, making the return trip take us 6:00 hours again.

On getting back to Piardoba, the name "Rush Order", was painted on the sides of #393. The name was appropriate since the plane had made two combat missions and four Hump trips in only fifteen days after rolling out of the factory at Marietta, Georgia.

After this trip, our crew had "Rush Order" taken away from us by Lt.Col. John Gregg's crew, as Gregg had become the squadron commander of the 768th. Since we had no particular plane to fly, we knew we'd be flying a variety of different aircraft. That didn't sit too well with us, since each plane develops its own characteristics and we knew we would not know how those planes had been maintained. As a sidenote, Gregg, who got #393, was the

son-in-law of Governor "Happy" Chandler of Kentucky.

On Monday, October 23, our crew was assigned plane #312 for a mission to be staged out of China. With the bombs loaded and the gas tanks filled, we took off in the afternoon over the Hump, heading for Kiunglai. There were broken clouds in the midst of the Hump, but we had occasional glimpses of the spots of green in the deep valleys surrounded by the massive peaks. As we approached A5, #2 engine gave us a bit of trouble, belching black smoke and throwing oil back over the wing. I reported the problem but Clark had a better view from the front and he could see the oil coming out the side of the engine. We anticipated having to repair a broken oil line when we got on the ground. Our Hump trip had taken us 5:35 hours. With our schedule calling for the mission to take off after midnight, our crew left the plane to go to briefing, while the ground crew came to say they would repair the oil line. As the briefing started, we were told the mission was delayed for a day, so we went to our tents, knowing we could repair the oil line the next day. After breakfast on the 24th, we went to the plane and the ground crew was beginning to take the rupturing oil line off the plane as we had to go to briefing on the mission to Omura, Japan, to hit an aircraft factory there. The takeoff was scheduled after midnight at 0200 on the 25th. After the briefing, we went down to the line to check on #312 and found our problem was more serious than we thought. We found that #2 engine had a cracked cylinder block which would require a new engine. Again, we were disappointed on making a mission due to those R3350 engines. There was no new engine on the field so we waited to watch the other planes take off at 0200 heading for Omura, then went to our bunks. That afternoon about 1600, the planes began to come back after what they said was a rough mission from the fighter attacks they received. Two planes were lost out of the Wing.

Since our crew had to wait at Kiunglai for a new engine to be flown in to us, we had little to do after the old engine was removed from the plane. On October 26, several of the planes had to remain in A5, making repairs due to battle damage, while the main force returned to Piardoba.

Shortly after dark on the 26th, the air raid sirens went off, indicating the Japanese bombers were heading our way. As we often did, Lee and I walked down towards the revetments where the planes were and we sat next to the drainage ditch close to a small bridge to see what was going to happen. As we saw the Japanese Betty bombers come over the area, I saw a flash of some kind in the Betty's bomb bay as the bombs were released. Due to the bombers' low altitude, there were quickly explosions along our parked planes, so I figured the bombers could not have been over 3,000 feet in the air. Obvously, the Japanese

intelligance knew we had no antiaircraft guns on the field.

After the enemy planes left, Lee and I ran to where our B-29s were parked. Apparently, several planes had received slight damage from the antipersonnel and fragmentation bombs which the Japanese bomber had dropped. However, "Miss Lace" was hit hard, but the one catching our main attention was "King Size" which had been hit on the left wing, blowing a hole into the fuel tank which was blazing. Not only were we concerned about the possible destruction of "King Size" but we also felt the blaze on the wing was making a good beacon for any other Japanese bombers which might come in again. We started immediately looking for a fire extinguisher and a ladder to get onto the left wing of "King Size". Several planes into which we stuck our heads looking for a fire extinguisher had a hissing sound and it finally dawned on us the hissing was coming from punctures having been made in the oxygen system lines. Finding an extinguisher and ladder, we crawled out on the wing and put the fire out. After getting the fire out, we got off the plane and were amazed at the number of small unexploded frag bombs lying around. We knew we'd stumbled over several of them in the dark getting to the plane, so we figured we'd been lucky none had gone off. Further, several of the Chinese guards had been hit by shrapnel, some seriously. We tried to give some first aid initially but medics from the Chinese garrison and our medical unit showed up and took over. Major Norman asked Lee for a report of our actions and said he was submitting the story of our activities for a decoration, then in the next breath he gave us hell for not being more careful and for being there in the first place. (General Orders issued April 22, 1945, Section IV, decorated both of us with the Soldiers Medal as the result of that action.)

The next day, the 27th, our new engine arrived and everyone pitched in to mount it on #312. It got completely installed and run up on the ground by the end of the day with no problems showing up. On the 28th, we flew in the vicinity of A5 for one hour, slow-timing the engine, to get ready to fly back to Piardoba. However, things took a different turn! We were called in by Lt.Col. Potter and told we were to make a photographic reconnaissance mission at high altitude. The plan was for us to fly over Sasebo, Omura, and Nagasaki on the Japanese island of Kyushu, then turn northeast to photograph the area around Kure on Honshu Island before returning to A5 across Honshu, using Cheju Island of Korea in the East China Sea as a navigation point. We were to go alone, carrying only gas in bomb bay tanks and cameras, plus 1000 rounds of ammunition per gun. We were to have a photographic specialist aboard to set all the vertical and oblique cameras aboard. On seeing the distance and the route we were to follow, we all became very tense. I asked if there was an estimate of the number of enemy aircraft we could possibly encounter along the route and Major Norman said the best estimate

was 2,780 fighters within one hundred miles of our route. I looked at Green, Briner, and Mackinaw who looked a bit nauseous, and I didn't feel too good either. We figured the distance would be about 3,800 miles and would take us about 18 hours, if we were lucky enough to complete it.

At 0330 hours, we lifted off, a very jittery bunch. An hour and a half out along our route, our radar man, Bill Curran, reported a river which he thought was the Han River on his scope. About that time, #3 engine blew and Steen had to feather the prop as we turned and headed back to Kiunglai. On inspection after getting on the ground, we found #312 needed another engine change. We were all disgusted and relieved, because down deep we felt we'd never been able to survive that trip from the first time we saw the route. We had spent only 3:00 hours in the air when we'd expected 18:00. That day, another new engine was ordered to be flown in to be put on #3 of #312.

After our abortion on the photographic mission, Capt. DeLong's crew was flown in from Piardoba to make their try at it. However, the top brass apparently had second thoughts about sending one plane to do the job, because two more planes were also brought in to help. As it turned out on the photographic mission, one plane was shot down, one crash landed at a 14th Air Force field, and DeLong's crew landed with two engines feathered and one man slightly wounded. Frankly, I shuddered thinking about that report.

On November 1, we slow-timed the new engine for an hour after installation, and on the 2nd, we flew back to Piardoba in 6:00 hours, feeling fortunate to see the place again.

We weren't scheduled to make the Rangoon mission on November 3, but we were on the list for a long mission to Singapore on November 4. Having no plane for our own, we were assigned to #506, not to be confused with the #506 in which McCullum's crew was killed on September 25. This #506 was 42-24506 manufactured in Wichita and was a later model.

Our target in Singapore was to be the floating dry dock located in the causeway which separated Singapore and Malaya. This dry dock had been built by the British in England, barged in sections to Singapore, and welded together there. When the Japanese invaded the Malaya peninsula and Singapore in early 1942, the British were so convinced they would be able to recapture the area in a short time, they did not scuttle the dry dock. This error in judgment by the British left the Japanese with the largest dry dock in the world to be used in repairing their naval vessels. For that reason, the destruction of the dry dock was a prime

consideration in the Pacific war effort.

After loading 8,250 gallons of fuel and 2, 1000lb. demonition bombs, we were ready to go to Singapore on November 4. All that gas was distributed among the wings, the center wing tank, and three bomb bay tanks in the front bomb bay. We were very heavy as we took off from Piardoba at 2300 hours, an hour before midnight. After we got out over the Bay of Bengal on a beautiful clear, moonlight night, I crawled into the tunnel and picked up a little sleep while we were out over water and not close to land. About 0630, the morning of the 5th, I climbed into my dome and we test fired all the guns without any malfunctions. Shortly, we began to see the Malaya Peninsula on our left, so we became more alert, knowing the Japanese air fields dotted the coast all the way down. About 0745, I reported to the entire crew by intercom that I had a crack in my plexiglass blister at the forward part of my dome. Although the crack was initially small, it seemed to be creeping slowly higher. Since we were under pressurize at altitude, I told everybody to have their oxygen masks ready in case the blister blew out. As we were forming into elements with other planes at our rendezvous in the Strait of Malacca at 0800, my blister blew out, taking my goggles and almost my helmet with an outrush of air. Only by slapping my hand on top of my head did I prevent the loss of my helmet and oxygen mask. With the other planes in our formation, we were over the target at 0810 that morning. The flak, which primarily came up from the naval vessels in the causeway, was accurate and heavy, indicating the Japanese navy had good radar. Several bursts were so close I could see the red in the center of the explosion, causing me to instinctively flinch and duck. With no blister, my imagination must have been working overtime since I thought some of the flak smoke came into the plane. As we left the target area, a Japanese Togo fighter came in on us from 11 o'clock low but turned away before Mackinaw could get a shot at it. Then, a Tony, a new Japanese fighter which resembled a U.S. P-51, made an attack from below, climbing to our altitude at 5 o'clock high. I was able to get all six of my guns on him, giving him a long burst. Flame shot out the right side of his engine and he peeled left in a dive into a cloud bank. Briner was scanning below, and Green just saw the Tony go into the cloud. I never heard anything from my report at debriefing later after we got back, but the official record issued showed, "1 plane destroyed, 1 probably destroyed, and 1 damaged !" We did have a good bomb run though. The problem was the Japanese had time to flood the dry dock to prevent damage to it.

As we started for home, I heard on the intercom that #506 was a "gas hog" and we had only 2880 gallons of gas left, not enough to get us back to Piardoba. To prevent having to ditch in the Bay of Bengal, the decision was made to head for China Bay, Ceylon. As we passed

Sebang on the northern tip of Sumatra, we spotted a Japanese airfield, but no planes took off. When our ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) at China Bay ran out, Steen told us to prepare for ditching, throwing out all excess weight out the rear hatch and shooting up all remaining ammunition. It reminded us of the Palembang mission! Bill Curran, our radar man, picked up Ceylon on his scope and we finally settled onto the runway at China Bay after 19:05 hours in the air. After spending the night with the British navy again, we refueled and flew back to Piardoba on the 6th in 5:45 hours. It had been another long trip.

Our crew had little to do, since we still had no plane of our own. From all indications, that fact was recognized as we ended up doing guard duty on the planes on the field. I did have some relief on the 8th and got to see a USO show which came to our base. I talked with one of the men who used to be with "Club Matinee" on CBS and he told me his group had been overseas for fifteen months entertaining the troops in different theaters of operations. I didn't ask why he wasn't in service, because he looked and acted a little "fruity" to me. Although there were only four performers in the USO group, they put on a good, entertaining show which we enjoyed.

On November 12, we were sent to A5 on a "tanker run" in #266, which had been stripped of all combat equipment and had nothing in the bomb bays but gas tanks, so it was able to carry a tremendous load of needed gasoline to increase the reserves in China. It was a beautiful, clear day on the Hump and we had a tail wind so heavy that our ground speed got up to 380 mph, but it still took us 5:30 hours to Liunglai. While we were at A5, we saw multitudes of formations of geese flying south. Normally, it would have been a great time to go hunting. It took some length of time to pump the gas out of #266, so we spent the night. We had to use our sleeping bags, as the temperature had dropped below freezing. The next morning, we headed back over the Hump for Piardoba, hitting the same winds we had going over, but this time the winds were headwinds. At one time, our ground speed dropped as low as 150 mph. We did get a good look at the construction going on for the Ledo Road to replace the Burma Road. It took us 6:30 hours to go back to India, and we landed with our tanks about dry, because of the headwinds encountered over the Hump.

Things were dragging for our crew without a plane to nurse, but the weather began to turn cooler at night though it was still quite warm during the day. At night, a blanket felt comfortable some of the time, something unusual since we arrived in India. We also moved into new barracks, primarily due to termites having gotten into the one we were in. The new one had electric lights which we hadn't had before. It was also larger since five crews of

enlisted men could live in it instead of just three crews before. Further, the showers and the latrine were much closer to us, so we felt we were making progress.

In our new barracks, Curran had put pin-up pictures of various girls in scanty dress on the wall next to his bunk. "Lightning", our house boy, was intrigued with the pictures, so one day he cut a picture out of a magazine of a naked baby and pinned it with Curran's pin-ups, saying, "Gooood!" We all got a kick out of his reaction. It wasn't long after that when Green received an 8" x 10" picture of his wife in a sheer, black lace night gown, and it was added to the wall "art".

On Monday, November 20, we were given a 4-day pass to Calcutta which surprised us all, so we caught the early morning train and got into Calcutta in the early afternoon. We enlisted men found bunks at the Metropole Hotel, 4 Dacres Lane, in room 203 with four British soldiers who had just gotten back from a 3-month patrol down the Mayala Peninsula to the outskirts of Singapore. The sergeant , whose bunk was next to mine, gave me a Japanese invasion note which he'd taken off a Japanese he'd killed in an engagement. To us, it was amazing that patrol was able to make that trek and get back alive. The whole British bunch were in bad physical shape from their trip, but they stayed drunk the whole time we were with them.

After checking in at the Metropole, I walked down Chowringhee to Eddie Lancaster's office in the Imperial Tobacco Company's building. He was floored seeing me. Since he was still working, he told me to go to his suite at the Bengal Club and his bearer (houseboy) would take care of me, as I wanted to take a bath and clean up. Eddie invited our whole crew to dinner at Firpo's that night. When I got to the Bengal Club, I took the lift (elevator) to the fifth floor where Eddie's suite was and went in. His bearer was nowhere in sight, but the bath water was drawn with towels laid out for my use. Not having had the luxury of a hot bath since coming to India, I really just lay there enjoying it. When I dried and came into the bedroom, I found my uniform had been pressed and my shoes had been shined with my socks turned back on them with "Boy", as Eddie called him, nowhere in sight. Also, "Boy" had placed a pot of hot tea with cakes on the table. Shortly, Eddie came in from his office and we had a long talk after getting in touch with the crew to meet us at Firpo's for dinner. That gave Eddie the opportunity to meet everyone on the crew and everyone seemed to enjoy the meeting.

During dinner, Eddie commented he missed being able to get American beer, having only an Australian product available, so the next day I went to the Hundustani Building where

the U.S. forces PX was located to buy him a case of American beer. The Hindustani Building was also the headquarters for all CBI (China-Burma-India) theater of operations supplies administration. The commanding general was Brigadier General Bob Neyland, who was coach of the University of Tennessee football team prior to the war. In order to get to the PX in the building, I had to go down a narrow hall lined with offices before I picked up the case of beer. As I came back down the narrow hall with the case of beer on my shoulder, B/Gen. Neyland burst out of one of the offices, without looking, and collided with me. The case of beer shot up in the air and came down on my head, addling me and knocking me to the floor. Instead of apologizing for hitting me, Neyland stood over me and cussed me for being in his way. Of course, I made no reply! However, a colonel and a master sergeant with him helped me up and quietly apologized with their expressions as Neyland stomped off. I had always heard Neyland thought he was God, and this incident convinced me he did indeed believe that.

Eddie and I lunched together each day, and he again invited the crew to dinner at Firpo's for our Thanksgiving on Thursday, November 23, 1944. Afterwards, Eddie took us to the movie, "Song of Bernadette", which was quite long, and I had a hard time staying awake on my full stomach.

Before leaving Calcutta, Briner and I bought a small stove which operated somewhat like a blowtorch. It had to be pumped up so the pressure would force the flame out through small holes. We knew we could get coffee on the base, so we could make cups of coffee in our barracks. Eddie also gave me a package of 1000 cigarettes his company produced, since our PX had run out, due to the increased shipping of supplies to Europe instead of to the CBI. When I got back to Piardoba, I handed the cigarettes out to everyone who needed them.

On November 26, we had an interesting lecture by a Mr.Williams, a Methodist missionary from Bankura. He explained the caste system in India and the Hindu religion. All of us there enjoyed the lecture, as his comments answered many of our questions about Hinduism which we confronted daily.

As soon as I got back to Piardoba, I got sent to late guard duty. Since it was the late shift, I had a hard time staying awake and welcomed the sun finally coming up in the morning, as it was getting chilly at night, but it was certainly more pleasant than the summer heat. Even so, it was hard to grab any sleep during the day after guard duty due to the noise in and around the barracks area.

On November 29, General LeMay came to Piardoba and presented several decorations to several men in our Group. The only ones on our crew who got the Air Medal were Steen, Schroen, and Green. The Group had to pass in review, and we did it surprisingly well considering the fact we had not marched in a long time. Afterwards, Steen expressed he didn't understand why the entire crew didn't receive the same decoration, but he felt it was coming.

After guard duty again on November 30, I took in a movie with Mackinaw, Briner, and Curran after dark. The movie was "Step Lively" with Frank Sinatra and Gloria DeHaven. It wasn't much, but it did give us something to do. All of us were getting restless, still wanting a plane of our own. Without a plane, we got scheduled for guard duty way too often.

The next day, December 1, we were told we'd be going to A5 in China and we'd been assigned to fly #346, "Man of War". I went to the plane and supervised the loading of 500 rounds per gun, plus checking out the CFC system. While I was there, armorers loaded sixteen 500lb. GP bombs in the bomb bays, and the gas truck loaded the plane's wings and center wing tank with a full load of gas. Our crew was excited about getting back into action and knowing something was brewing for us. Before leaving Piardoba, we were told the mission would be to Omura, Japan, which had been a pretty rough trip previously, but we felt we were ready for it.

The morning of the 2nd, leaving Piardoba and climbing, we encountered heavy clouds over the Hump, but in spite of the lousy weather we were not delayed getting into Kiunglai and landed after 5:35 hours. The runway and surrounding area at A5 showed signs of a pretty heavy rain. The weather was cool and our jackets felt good during the day. Everything on #346 ran well and we felt comfortable with the plane. At night, our downfilled double sleeping bags kept us nice and warm. The scheduled briefing due on the 3rd was cancelled, since the weather over Omura was so nasty, but the briefing was rescheduled for the 4th with the mission being rescheduled for the 5th. Again, the mission was delayed with the weather over Omura being the problem. On the 5th, we went to briefing and found the mission had been changed to Mukden, Manchuria, on December 7, to bomb the aircraft factory there.

On December 7, 1944, the third anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the start of the United States' participation in World War II, we lifted off at 0247 and climbed on course for Mukden, Manchuria. The first leg of the trip was in the dark with daylight breaking as be crossed Po Hai Bay to the west of Darien and Port Arthur. As we arrived at our rendezvous to form into an element with other planes, our heater within the plane went out. Quickly, it became

cold as the devil, and Clark told us on the intercom the temperature both inside and outside the plane was 57° below zero. My blister kept frosting up, although I kept the defroster running continually, I had to use my handkerchief to wipe the frost off the inside of it. Since none of us had heated suits, our flight jackets didn't offer us much warmth. Everyone on the crew had put on their furlined boots, except me. My boots weren't to be found. My feet were numb!

From my position on top of #346, I could see the vapor trails of the fighters circling over both Mukden and Anshan. As we made our turn on our IP towards Mukden, the fighters from Anshan streamed towards Mukden to meet us. Of course all the B-29s were leaving heavy vapor trails themselves which gave the fighters a perfect indication of our route. About ten minutes from the target, the first wave of fighters came in on us at II o'clock high. In that first pass, I sent a burst of fire at the lead plane, and it seemed to me my tracers were lagging my sight. I called George Clark, asking if he had entered the proper information into the CFC computer system. He relied, "Certainly", but within ten seconds I noticed my upper aft turret jerked about an inch, indicating George had just entered the information and turned on his unit. After that, the system worked fine. As we got closer to Mukden, the fighters hit us in force, diving through their own flak to get to us. The Japanese set off smoke generators to cover the target as we got there, and Tommy didn't have a very clear picture of the factory. Curran said our bombs may have been slightly left of the main tartget but well within acceptable range as we dropped while bucking about a 100mph headwind. When that force of fighters hit us, it lasted for over an hour and all hell broke loose. Being an aircraft production factory, we were attacked by Japanese fighters of all types: Zekes, Togos, Nicks, Irvings, Tonys, Georges, Hamps, and even a Val, a fixed gear dive bomber. The fighters came in high in "chow line" fashion, so our gunners were continually firing. The greatest number of attacks came high into the nose, so I was firing constantly and not having time to look around much as I had to pick up the next fighter coming in. Flak was light, but the fighters were very aggressive. I felt I took pieces off many fighters but neither I nor anyone else had time to see whether they went down or not. Leaving the target area, the fighters followed us back to Po Hai Bay before they left us and returned to Mukden, much to our relief. It was figured we had 57 encounters on our plane in the target area. All the gunners on the plane had spent a heavy day of shooting, getting pieces of fighters as they came in and went by. When we got back to Kiunglai, we found the lower aft turret was out of ammunition, and the lower forward had less than 150 rounds left. In my two upper turrets, there was less than 100 rounds total for all guns left. The tail had about fifty percent of his ammo left, as he was confined to only passing shots. At debriefing, we were told one plane was rammed and one ditched in Po Hai Bay, while another had two casualties aboard. One the engineers on a 769th plane was shot in the gut and was killed. The official

report came out stating there were 7 B-29s lost and the gunners had claimed 20 Japanese fighters destroyed, 10 probably destroyed, and 30 damaged. I never understood how anyone could have time to count anything in that fight!

On the way back to A5 from Mukden, we were able to see the Great Wall of China, snaking across the landscape. Even at our altitude, we could not see the beginning or the end of the wall coming from the northwest to near Po Hai Bay where it looped back to the north, it seemed.

When we landed back at Kiunglai we had been in the air for 13:50 hours, and it seemed a lifetime. The plane weathered the trip well, but due to my frozen feet, I had to receive help getting out of the plane. They soaked my feet in luke warm water for about an hour and they were all right, I felt. After landing, Ross found my boots which were under his seat cushions but none of us had time during the attacks to really search for them.

We had a little engine trouble with #3 engine returning from Mukden, as the engine cut out briefly on a couple of occasions, so we spent the day of the 8th correcting the problem. Due to the lateness in the day after working on the engine, we spent another night at Kiunglai, where the weather had turned quite cold. At A5, a shower house had been built and rigged with a way to have hot water. There was a fireplace where a Chinese heated the water. The water was poured into a 5-gallon wooden tub with a hole in the bottom which had a rubber flap attached on the inside. With a string attached to the flap, the bucket was hoisted by rope over the bather who pulled the string, opening the flap, and letting the hot water flow over whoever was taking the shower. It worked pretty well and the hot water certainly felt good. The only problem was the person drying off got very little warmth from the fireplace, so we would freeze while drying and dressing in the cold temperatures.

On the 9th, we took off from A5, expecting to fly over the Hump, but at takeoff we had an electrical failure just as the wheels came up and all engines at maximum power with high rpm. That electrical failure meant we had no control over the props, flaps, or landing gear, plus no instruments were working in the cockpit. In order to switch to emergency power, we had to activate the power generator in the rear of the plane which got its starting energy from the plane's main battery which was then dropped out of the system. Our only choice was to crank the "putt putt" by hand, but due to the cold weather we were unable to get it to fire. With our engines set at full power, we were burning fuel at a high rate, so Steen said we'd have to burn off our gas before possibly making a "belly landing". In the midst of all of us taking turns pulling

the rope on the auxiliary power plant, O'Malley got the "G.I.'s" and had to head for the pot. He took a lot of kidding, while we cranked. Finally, after almost two hours of trying to start the auxiliary generator and burning up fuel, we got the generator to start, enabling us to have emergency electrical power to activate the instruments and control the gear and the flaps. One of the parts of the system which did not operate on the emergency power was the indicator light on the landing gear which told whether the gear was down and locked. With that in mind, we braced ourselves on the landing in the event the gear folded as we touched the runway. As things turned out, everything worked well and we landed without difficulty. On inspection, we found the electrical panel behind #3 engine had shorted out, creating our problem. Finally, on December 11, we managed to fly back to Piardoba in 5:50 hours after replacing the panel. We'd been gone from Piardoba for nine days and we had a load of mail waiting.

After some minor repairs on the engines, we took #346 back up on the 12th on an engineering hop. Since everything checked out well, we flew only 1:10 hours before landing.

The agony of being without a plane of our own was disappointing all of us. Our crew missed a couple of missions as other crews took their own planes. We felt we were getting rusty, plus we were falling behind in the mission count in comparison with the other crews. About that time, the Group got a new type of apparatus to train gunners and I enjoyed using it while helping train some of the new men who had joined the Group. At least it was something to do!

Christmas Eve, Sunday, we had a candlelight service at the chapel on the base. It was a pleasant service with carols and scriptures. The new Rocker Club for enlisted non-commissioned men, the rank of staff sergeant and above, opened with all the decorations for Christmas, making it a relaxing place to be. There was a radio to pick up Armed Forces Radio, so we could keep up with the war news from around the wolrd. Christmas Day was a very quiet day since no work was scheduled. Our dinner consisted of canned turkey, cranberry sauce, and all the trimmings, similar to what we had at Thanksgiving. It was a nice day, but I don't remember sweating on Christmas Day before.

Close to midnight, after I'd gone to sleep that night, the blast from the antiaircraft guns near our barracks nearly blew me out of my bunk going off. It was a warning the Japanese bombers out of Burma were headed our way. As it turned out, the British fighters met them and turned them back before they ever got near our base. Even so, we had a hard time going back to sleep.

On Wednesday, December 27, 1944, we made our last flight of the year. It was a ferrying flight over the Hump in B-29, #312, which we had flown back in October and with which we had so much trouble. The Hump trip was also a formation training flight to Kiunglai. We took off at 0630 and fell into formation with two other planes as we went over the Hump on a clear winter day. We carried 30, 500lb. general purpose bombs to increase the stockpile for future missions out of A5. Flying in formation slows the normal speed due to the jocking to maintain a close unit, so our flight was longer than normal. Our trip took us 6:50 hours, and we waited to have our bombs unloaded. Coming back over the Hump, we flew as individual planes, so we returned to Piardoba in 5:30 hours, landing about 2000 hours. The beauty of the mountains over the Hump always amazed me, as something new would be noticed on each new trip. In any case, making trips over and back in one day was tiring, so I was ready for the "sack" shortly after chow.

New Year's Eve was no different than any other day at Piardoba, but things began to change as we gathered at the Rocker Club to bring in 1945. Since there were spirits in the form of beer, gin, and some rum at the club, several men got quite "high" as the clock ticked towards midnight. Wishing everyone, "Happy New Year, I left the club about fifteen minutes after midnight, anticipating a good night's sleep. I was mistaken! It was all wishful thinking! It seemed as I tried to go to sleep I was jinxed. Almost immediately, someone woke me up with a "Happpy New Year" and then a crap game developed beside my bunk. About 0430 hours on January 1, I dozed off only to have a rather drunk D.B.Green lose his balance and sit down on my head, since it was the most convenient place to fall. I jumped up and slugged him, knocking him flat. Mackinaw broke up the fight, and the two of us put Green to bed. Finally, I dropped off to sleep about 0500. What a hectic night! Thank goodness, we had no work duty on the first or the second of the new year.

On January 3, 1945, we took one of the planes in the squadron up for an engineering hop after some repairs for 1:15 hours. After landing and parking the plane, I started to get out of the rear of the plane and realized the ladder had been left lying on the pavement instead of being pulled into the back door. Since it was only about six feet to the ground, I swung through the hatch and dropped to the ground. As I let go of the frame of the rear door, a ring of Barbara's caught on a rivet head, breaking the ring and peeling the skin of my little finger off as if it were a glove. At the dispensary, the medics dressed the finger and covered it with sulfa after prying the ring open to get it completely off. It was sore for several days but healed without infection. The ring, which was an heirloom handed down to Barbara, was later taken to Calcutta, where a jeweler repaired it so well it looked as good as new.

We took another plane up to check out recent repairs on January 4, but the flight lasted only 40 minutes since the oil leak reappeared and we had to land. Again, on January 5, we took another plane up for another engineering hop after repairs, flying for 1:25 hours. It seemed our crew was being used as a checkout crew, not having a plane of our own. During this period, I read "Immortal Wife" by Irving Stone. It was a biographical novel about Jessie Benton Freemont, the wife of John Fremont, and the part she played in the development and mapping of our west. I found it most interesting.

We missed missions to Bangkok on the 2nd, Omura on the 6th, and Formosa on the 9th, since we had no plane. Our morale was getting about as low as it could get. I asked Steen to try to find out why we couldn't get a new plane, and he did go to see the colonel. The explanation he got was there were no new planes coming into Piadoba, and the reason didn't make us feel any better. After Saipan in the Mariana Islands in the Pacific was invaded by the U.S. Marines, the airfield was taken. As the island was secured, the airfield was enlarged to accommodate B-29s. The 73rd Wing, which was formed as we left the States, occupied that field by October 20, 1944, with 60 B-29s. Also, the island of Tinian, across the bay from Saipan, was shortly taken, with the 313th Wing moving there. By the end of December, the 314th Wing flew onto Guam. With the much shorter distance to Japan than we in the 58th Wing had, all the production of new B-29s coming from the factories was directed to fulfill those Wings' needs, leaving us without any planes. The Wings in the Marianas just sucked up all the production, explaining why we got no new planes.

On an upcoming mission to Omura, Lt. Col. Roush's crew was missing a left gunner due to illness, so Mackinaw was asked to take his place. They flew to A5 on the January 5, and took off for Omura on January 6, 1945, for a daylight mission to Omura. On the report I got, as the plane came away from the target, they were jumped by fighters that knocked out one engine and caught another on fire. Witnesses said they saw seven chutes come out of the plane over the East China Sea as the plane started losing control due to the fire aboard. We all hoped Mackinaw could be saved as a prisoner of war, but nothing was ever heard of him again. That was the last 58th Wing mission staged out of China.

F/Sgt. Bob Marker came by the barracks and asked me to clean out Mackinaw's foot locker, so his effects could be sent to his father's home. Since no one knew the combination to the lock on the locker, I was told it was okay to break the lock, so on the 9th I opened the locker. Mackinaw was not a smoker, but he took his monthly allotment of cigarette cartons,

plus any others he could get from non-smokers. A carton of cigarettes cost 50¢ in our PX, and practically everyone on our crew knew Mackinaw was selling the cartons in China when we made trips to A5. He always bought Pell Mell cartons, since they were the only king size cigarettes made at that time. By selling in China, he was able to get the equivalent of $50 per carton for regular size cartons, whereas the king size brought $55. Even in China, he always took his money from a sale in rupees, Indian money, since the Chinese yuan exchange rate was volatile due to inflation. With his clothes and other personal effects, I found the equivalent of $3,000 in rupees, apparently from his cigarette sales on the black market. Quietly talking with Bob Marker, the first sergeant, it was agreed if I listed the cash on the inventory of Mack's effects, it would just disappear and there was no way it could be sent to the States, since no more than $100 could be sent per month by an individual. I came up with the idea of trying to get individuals in the Group to send the money as they could to Mack's father on a money order. Marker said to try it, but he doubted it would get there. I handed out the money in cash to many of the men in the Group, particularly those in our squadron, who agreed to send it. Some of them said they would have to spread it over two or three months, but they would do it. I kept a list of the men who accepted the money and the amount they took, feeling I'd be lucky if half of the money got to Mr. Mackinaw in Birmingham. The rest of the items in the locker were taken to the squadron adjutant who reviewed them, had them packed, and sent to Mack's father. (In September, 1945, after I returned to the States, I talked with Mr. Mackinaw, J.B.'s father, and he told me he received the entire amount of $3,000 over a period of about four months. I was surprised and elated! My faith in the men of our Group was enhanced!)

On Tuesday, January 10, we were assigned B-29 #459 out of our squadron for a mission to Singapore with Milton Bekritsky as our new left gunner, replacing Mackinaw. Our assignment was that of a spare, being able to fly the mission only if one of the other planes didn't get off the ground. At about 2300 hours, all the scheduled planes got off, so we thought that canceled our flight. However, we were notified to leave #459 and proceed to #873, which was equipped with cameras for a photo recon mission, as a followup on the Singapore mission. We took off at 0200 on January 11, three hours behind the other planes. Out over the Bay of Bengal, we flew at 7,000 feet until at dawn we hit the Malaya Peninsula where we got jumped by a Japanese Val, but one burst discouraged any further attacks. We climbed to 27,000 feet to make our photo run over Singapore, but we found an undercast of heavy clouds, so we dropped to 21,000 feet, where one fighter came up to look at us but turned and went home. We made six runs over the city, trying to get decent pictures but with the clouds, we doubted that we came up with any good pictures. As our fuel was beginning to run low, we had to leave the area and head on our route back. As we headed north, we were able to photograph our

secondary target of Georgetown on Panang with good results. We saw 12 fighters take off from a field but they never reached our altitude. After 17:45 hours in the air, we settled onto the runway at Piardoba, a tired crew.

After a night's sleep, we were told our crew was being sent to a rest camp in Madras, India, in the south on the Bay of Bengal. The only ones who were not going were Steen and O'Malley, who were asked to stay on the field. We caught the train at Piardoba the early afternoon of January 12, arriving Calcutta in about five hours, so I had time to see Eddie that evening. The adjutant had given us 3rd class train tickets, leaving Calcutta the morning of the 13th, for the two day trip to Madras. The compartment was rough as all get-out with only wooden benches to sit and sleep on. To top it all off, the train was infested with bedbugs and roaches. Everytime the train stopped, we set off an aerosol disinfectant bomb while we got out and watched the roaches run out from under the door. I don't recall what kind of accommodations the officers had, but ours were horrible. The bedbugs literally chewed on me all that first night. We got to see a lot of India but there was nothing comfortable about it. The second night, I climbed up on the luggage rack overhead to get away from the roaches and I got a little more rest than the night before. We got into Madras the morning of the 15th, anxious to bathe and change clothes.

Our rest camp had originally been a girls' orphanage which had been turned over to our government to be used as a rest camp for U.S. troops. As soon as we were assigned our bunk section, Ross Briner rushed into the latrine area and sat down to relieve his stomachache. As he finished, he hollered wanting to know how to flush "this thing". We pointed out there was a heel pedal near his foot on the floor, so he stepped on it. To his amazement, and ours, the contents in the bowl was blasted with water all over his bare bottom and lower parts. It then dawned on us, Ross had sat down on a bidet. We learned quickly not to use that again.

On the 16th, we took in the sights around Madras by rickshaws and determined it was the cleanest Indian city we'd seen. That evening, we had dinner at the Connemara Hotel, a beautiful granite and marble stone structure. Since a dance was going on there, we drifted in and I danced with one of the nurses there. A suggestion was made later that we go to another hotel where there also was a dance. At the next hotel, there were several English girls at the dance but even more Anglo-Indian girls. All were good dancers. About midnight, we got rickshaws and went back to the rest camp dog tired.

We rented bicycles the afternoon of the 17th and got a real good look at Madras, riding through different parts of it. There were some areas with beautiful colonial homes and the people were very gracious to us. We rode so long and so far, all of us were complaining of aching tails, since we'd even ridden through some of the run-down section of the city to see what it looked like, and we found it remarkably well kept.

We got back to the camp, bathed, had dinner, and wandered into a dance the camp had organized there. I met and danced with a Scottish girl, Maureen Turner. The camp commander, Capt. Chuck Preston, had brought her to the dance, but when things broke up, she couldn't find him anywhere, so I took her home. She and her family lived in the Connemara Hotel, and I was introduced to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Turner.

Mr. Turner was quite interesting. He was Standard Oil's director in the Far East and told me Maureen had been born in Shanghai, China, but when the Japanese moved in, their family had been moved to Singapore in 1939. When the Japanese invaded the Malaya Peninsula in early 1942, he had sent Maureen and her mother to Madras. When the enemy troops got close to Singapore, he had escaped by boat in a hairy trip to Madras. The pictures he showed me of the bombing of Singapore were fascinating to see.

The morning after the dance at the camp, a sergeant came by my bunk to tell me that Capt. Preston wanted to see me in his office. As I walked in, I identified myself, saying I understood he wanted to see me. Without so much as an acknowledgement, he started giving me uncharted hell for taking his "date" home from the dance. I tried to explain she couldn't find him and I felt she shouldn't go home alone. The explanation had no effect and he just blew up, saying Maureen was his "date". About that time, I noticed a picture of a lady and two small children on his desk, plus I was tired of his ranting. I told him he was obviously a married man with a wife and daughters, so he was out of bounds dating anyone! I also told him he was commander of the camp, but he had no jurisdiction over my personal time while I was there at the rest camp. He asked for my commanding officer's name and my unit address, which I gave him. As I left, he said he was demanding that my commanding officer "bust" me in rank for my insubordination and actions. With that, I left his office, burning up!

That evening, Maureen called me at the camp, inviting me to dinner with her parents at the Connemara Hotel for the next evening, Friday the 19th. Arriving for dinner at 1900 hours, I was escorted to the Turner's table where they were waiting for me. The dinner was delicious, but the real treat of the evening was talking with the Turners, hearing of all the experiences the

family had in China and Singapore. I told Mr. Turner I had flown over Singapore twice and probably would be down that way again. He drew me a sketch of Singapore, locating where their house was on the northern end of the only hill in the center of the island city, just off the broad road circling the area. He said it was the only house with a white roof and overlooked the causeway. He commented he had talked with a man who had escaped from there and was told the Japanese command had taken over his former home. I said I'd look for the house on my next trip down there. After dinner, Maureen and I got a rickshaw and went to a movie. After the show, I took Maureen to the Connemara and picked up another rickshaw to go back to the rest camp. Before leaving, she asked the fellow pulling the rickshaw what the charge was to take me back, speaking to him in Hindu, which startled him. She then told me what to pay him and how much to tip him. The tip was a lot less than we had been giving for the same trip, but she said we'd been spoiling the pullers.

On Saturday, January 20, I took her to lunch in the coffee shop at the Connemara. As I started to pay the check, the head waiter told me he had orders from Mr. Turner that any charge I made there was to billed to his suite and not to me. That embarrassed me but the waiter was insistent. Seeing a problem, I took Maureen to dinner at another hotel that evening.

On Sunday, Briner and I got bicycles and rode out to the beach, if it could be called that. There was very little sand, mostly small, round stones, like gravel. Also, the shore sloped sharply into the ocean. Wading into the water, we found with the slope we were over our heads within fifteen feet of the shore and the undertow had a terrific current. As we were talking about the depth and current, a loud bell began to clang and a sign was quickly posted telling that sharks were in the area and swimming was forbidden. We noticed the fishermen offshore came in closer to shore in their small, outrigger dugouts. While we watched, we saw several sharks caught, one of which looked to be about six feet long. We cycled back to the camp and played ping pong while listening to good music from Armed Forces Radio. Before going to our barracks, I called Maureen to set up dinner for Monday evening. She said she had to work late, so I was to pick her up at her office at 1900 hours. She gave me the directions to find her office and told me to give my name to the man at the entrance.

Woody MacLeod, one of the ground armorers at our base, was there at rest camp at the same time we were. He was from Dearborn, Michigan, and was an excellent tennis player. Not finding anyone to play tennis with, Woody asked me to play with him, although I hadn't played much at all, it had been at least six years since I touched a racket. Even so, he talked me into playing right in the middle of the hottest part of the day. We played five sets and I was

absolutely exhausted and wringing wet to my socks. After finishing, I showered and hit the sack for a nap, asking Macinaw to wake me in time to pick up Maureen. Mack woke me at 1700 hours which gave me plenty of time.

Following Maureen's directions, I got a rickshaw and the puller took me to a one-story stone building with two sets of high barbed wire fencing all around it. There were two British armed guards at the gate and two more at the second set of wires. At the door, inside the fences, there were two more guards. It struck me there was no sign anywhere to identify the building or its use. As I approached the first gate, one of the soldiers asked me my business, while the other seemed poised to shoot if necessary. I gave the soldier who spoke to me my name and he checked a notebook he had in the small cupola while making a phone call. Coming back to me, he asked that I wait across the street and "Miss Turner will be out immediately". Within minutes, Maureen came out of the building where she surrendered her badge. As she approached the interior line of wires, the guard checked her pass, then the exterior guard took half of her pass as she came out. I'm sure my mouth was hanging open by that time, as we got into the rickshaw to head for dinner. I did ask her what kind of work she did in that building. Her simple reply was "British Intelligence".

We went to Bisotto's Hotel for dinner and chatted about her job, as much as she could tell me. She said most of her time was spent monitoring Japanese radio broadcasts and some Chinese ones too. Quite often, she said, her time was taken up by the Japanese naval vessel messages. Realizing she must be multilingual, I asked her what languages she spoke. I found she fluently spoke five dialects of Chinese, Japanese, Portugese, Dutch, German, Hindu, Malayasian, French, and of course, English. She also said she could get by in Spanish and Siamese. Her job was to check broadcasts and determine if there was anything important. If there was something important, she would interpret it. Most of her notes were sent to the cryptographic section for evaluation and action, if necessary. She said there were four of them doing that type of work and she was the only female. I was completely amazed and throroughly impressed with that nineteen year old lady!

On Tuesday, January 23, Briner, Schroen, and I took a tour out to several of the temples from the Red Cross building in town. It was interesting, since the temples were each different, depicting different facets of the many religions throughout India. That night, Woody MacLeod, had a date with a friend of Maureen's, Joan Braddel, whose family also lived in the Connemara and had been evacuated from Singapore. Mr. Braddel was English, while Mrs. Braddel was an American from Cleveland, Ohio. The four of us had dinner together, then Woody and I got

rickshaws back to the camp.

Wednesday, January 24, Schroen, Briner and I got bicycles again and just visited places we hadn't seen before. I did run into Capt. Chuck Preston at breakfast, but he turned and went the opposite direction to keep from speaking to me. I had planned on having dinner with Maureen that evening, but Mrs. Turner called to say she had been called to report for work on an emergency basis, so she'd be unable to go. Woody and Joan were to go with us, so I just went on to dinner with them, and when they went to the movie, I went back to camp and went to bed after talking with Briner for awhile.

Thursday, January 25, was our last day at the rest camp, since we were catching the train for Calcutta early on the 26th. None of us did much of anything that day except pack our belongings and get ready for the dance that night at the camp. About 1800 hours, Woody and I went to the Connemara, picking up Joan and Maureen for dinner and then out to the camp for the dance. Joan Braddel gave me a St. Anthony medal to attach to my dog tags chain and I wore it from then on. The dance was over about 2200 hours, so by rickshaw I took Maureen home and dropped in to see her parents to thank them for all their kindnesss while I was there. Mr. Turner told me they would be going to Santa Monica, California, in April. Mrs. Turner and Maureen would live there for the duration, but he had to return to Madras to transact his business. I wished them well, and Maureen and I had a champagne at the bar in the Connemara before I went back to the rest camp. The Turners had certainly been wonderful to me during my short stay there in Madras.

Early on the 26th, we boarded the train in Madras for the long two days to Calcutta. In the compartment next to us, there were four British soldiers who picked up a young Indian girl and kept her with them until the next day, and from the sounds coming from that compartment, they were having quite a party. As they put her out at some small place the next day, she seemed to be happy but her gestures indicated she was pretty sore. Our trip was the same lousy two days and nights fighting roaches and bedbugs, arriving Calcutta late on January 28. I tried to contact Eddie, but he was out of town on business. After spending the night at the Red Cross, we caught the morning train out of Calcutta and got into Piardoba shortly after noon on the 29th. We were so tired from the train rides, we were ready for rest camp again.

Returning to our base at Piardoba, we found Ralph Steen, who didn't go to rest camp, had left to join General LeMay on Guam, and Lt. Gene Haberman had taken over our crew. It was a real shocker to us, as we trusted Steen and his ability. Our morale was pretty low, not

having a plane of our own and then this loss of our commander left us much to contend with. We also found out the O'Malley left with Steen, as did Ralph Bailey, my friend from Erwin. initially, we felt we'd been cheated! I did find out Steen tried to take me with him to Guam, but Henry "Hap" Horner, the CFC gunner on the same crew as Ralph Bailey, raised so much hell that I was left in Piardoba. Frankly, I had no regrets because it would have meant leaving the rest of our crew. After the shock wore off, the rest of the crew resolved to get to know Gene Haberman and work with him on continuing to be a top notch crew.

Among the batch of letters I had on returning to base, I found out my friend, Hubert "Hugo" Taliaferro, had been taken as a prisoner of war in Europe. I agonized over his plight, but I also felt sorry for his parents, as Hugo's younger brother, Gilbert,had been killed two months earlier. I also learned Cliff Beasley, my former roommate at W&L, had been wounded in France.

On February 10, we were posted for a mission on the next day. We were assigned to fly a Model A1 B-29, #42-3838, built at Renton, Washington. That afternoon, the bomb bays of #838 were filled with 64 fragmentation bombs and we loaded 400 rounds of ammo per gun. Before going to briefing, we knew it would be a short trip, since we didn't carry any extra gas tanks in the front bomb bay. On Sunday, February 11, we went to briefing, which detailed our target as a large Japanese supply concentration at a suburb just north of Rangoon, Burma, called Mingaladoon. It was where the Japanese concentrated all their supplies for use by their troops in Northern Burma. At 0930, we took off, shortly heading out over the Bay of Bengal. Enroute, Milton Bekritsky, our left gunner who replaced Mackinaw, took three black cubes linked together with black ribbon out of his flight bag. He placed the cubes on his right and left forearms and on his forehead, while reading from his Yiddish prayer book. Briner watched him for a minute, the said, "What the hell is he doing?" We finally figured out his action was part of his Jewish faith. Our rendezvous area was over the mouths of the Irrawaddy River where we formed into four-plane elements and flew to the IP south of Rangoon. Turning north towards Rangoon, we encountered moderate but very accurate flak. Even though the flak was moderate overall, the concentration over the target was quite heavy. We got a few hits in our wings and the dorsal fin. I had one burst go off just over my head and it scared the devil out of me, but none of it hit the plane. Briner was able to follow our bombs into the target, saying they were "dead center". We had a fighter attack from an Oscar, but it came in low, so I was unable to get a shot at it, but I called on Bikritsky to pick it up as it came around our left wing. The Oscar was fairly close, but Bekritsky froze and just watched it go by without shooting. It would have been an easy shot. To unfreeze him, I kicked Bekritsky in the back of the head and got

him back to reality. All of us were pleased with our new pilot, Gene Haberman, as if we had any say in the matter. We landed back in Piardoba after logging 7:40 hours on that mission.

Hallelujah! On Monday, February 12, 1945, our crew was given a new plane of our own after being without one for four months after cracking up #248 in October, 1944. The plane, #42-63457, was a Model 20, produced in the Boeing Marietta plant. Painted on the tail was 263457, a straight flush. She was a real beauty. To get familiar with #457, our crew took her up on the 13th, flying north around the Taj Mahal at Agra, India. It was an impressive sight from the air. We flew for 3:45 hours, and after landing the Hellbirds emblem was painted on the side and the rudder was painted blood red, identifying #457 with our Group. Also, the large T1 was painted on the tail.

On the morning of February 14, all the ground support personnel left Piardoba by train to be shipped to another destination. Everyone suspected they were heading to the Mariana Islands in the Pacific but we had no definite location. Since we had stopped flying missions out of China, we felt our crew and the planes would be moving soon. With the ground crews gone, it meant the flight crews would have to handle all functions, just as we did in Kansas after the ground personnel left, only this time the crews had to also handle the ammo and bombs for any mission.

On Tuesday, February 14, we, as a crew, started going over the plane and maintaining it. We were happy to have a plane to report to daily. As with previous planes, I harmonized the guns with the turrets and sights, checking out the entire CFC system. I was happy as a hog in mud! Due to some engine adjustments, we flew #457 for an hour on the 18th. Fine tuning everything, we flew the plane again on the 20th for 2:00 hours.

The night of the 14th, we enlisted men on the crew took all the officers to our Rocker Club for dinner. We had fried chicken with fried potatoes, beets and tomatoes. Not only was the meal delicious, but everyone had a good time. The cost at the club for eleven of us was the equivalent of $18.50, a real bargain. Fortunately, all the officers on the crew were enjoyable to be with and I don't recall any of them ever pulling rank unless there was a breech of common sense or not getting a job done by an individual. I just felt they were all friends of mine.

There was a mission to Singapore on February 24, but for some reason our crew wasn't scheduled to go, which disgusted us. One of the men from a crew in our barracks who went on the mission said the weather over the target was lousy and no fighters came up to meet

them. All the planes in our Group returned without difficulty, but the Wing announced that one plane from another group ditched with mechanical trouble and was lost.

After working around #457 for the next few days, we were posted for a mission on March 2. On February 27, we were given the list for the bomb load, so we headed for the bomb dump. Since the ground armament crew had left, each crew had to pick up their own bombs for loading, as noted. Two men had to use a bar hook to pick up each 500lb. bomb, walk it to the low-boy, and lift it on to the platform for trucking to the plane. Our crew started that process, which was slow, back-breaking work. Suddenly, I recalled seeing a Caterpillar tractor with a hoist sitting back off the road into the dump, so I stopped our loading until I could run back to look at the Cat. After some fiddling around with it, I got the Cat started and walked it to where we were loading. By manipulating the levers on the Cat, I figured which operated the azimuth and which the zenith up and down with the cable and hook. With other members of the crew placing the hook on the bomb on the stacked pile, I could lift and swing it to the low-boy, then let it down into place. After a few tries, we got fairly fast with the loading. In the process, I knocked Green and Briner off the low-boy once each. By this method, we left the dump to take our bombs back to the plane before any of the other crews had picked up very many bombs. In fairly short time, we had #457 loaded. About the time we finished loading, the first segeant came by asking if I would go back to the dump to run the Cat, so the other crews could load their planes faster. Back I went and stayed with it until all the bombs for our squadron were loaded. I stayed a little longer to instruct a fellow from the 769th how to run the Cat before I left the whole process with them. By the end of the day, I was pretty well worn out.

On the 28th, we loaded the ammo and checked out our gunnery system. Although everything on #457 seemed in great shape, we spent time rechecking all the engines and running them up until Baker was satisfied with their operation.

On March 1, we were briefed for a mission to Singapore again to hit the naval warehouses along the causeway. After reporting to #457 at 2300 hours, we took off at 0038 on March 2 for the long mission. Almost immediately after takeoff, we were in thick clouds with everything dark as pitch, as we turned on course out over the Bay of Bengal. Within a very short time, I heard on the intercom Curran reporting that his radar was out and not operating. That problem set up a tremendous navigation job for George Clark on this long trek. Clark had no look at the ground and no sight of any stars on which to take a fix, since the clouds were so deep below and above us. We were literally "flying blind". Out over the water of the Bay of Bengal, Manny Baker started to transfer fuel from the center wing tank into the wing tanks, as

was standard procedure. All of a sudden, the entire plane was filled with gas fumes, practically knocking us out. We had to go on oxygen immediately and much of the electrical system was shut down to prevent sparks. Baker went into the bomb bay trying to stop the flow of gas out of the center wing tank and he got soaked in fuel before the transfer pump could be cut off. Manny's eyes had to be washed out and his skin washed to prevent burns. From all indications, when the center wing fuel transfer pump was replaced on March 1, apparently someone installed the wiring backwards, resulting in the pump reversing when used. To clear the fumes from the plane, Tommy opened the bomb bay doors and we opened the hatches in the rear. By the time the overflow was stopped, we'd lost 300 gallons of precious gas and we were still flying in the soup, not seeing ground or sky. Getting close to our rendezvous point, Habe asked Clark how long before we'd break out. George replied he expected us to break out in "eleven and a half minutes". Briner and I looked at each other and commented what a bluffer Clark was. In about ten more minutes, Habe called Clark and asked again and Geroge said "a minute and a half". Damned if in a minute we broke out of the clouds and the other planes were about a thousand feet below us forming up into elements. What a great piece of navigation by George Clark! From then on, we were convinced our Queen's railroad man could take us any place blindfolded. We ended up in a 3-plane formation, and as we turned on the IP, we were told to take over the lead. We had to pull like the devil to get in position to let Tommy set up his bombsight for the bomb run. Instead of going in at 109°, Habe told Tommy to go straight and then make his turn into the target. It was a good thing we extended our run, because the two Japanese cruisers and a bunch of destroyers opened up right at our level but where we would have been had we not extended our turn. From Briner's view of the target, our bombs dropped well on target. On letting the bombs go, the front bomb bay fuel tanks dropped on the front bomb bay doors, which were not open with the bombs only in the rear. This was caused by the salvo bars not being put in place on the right side of the plane, as they should have been. As we turned left, we got rocked pretty well by flak, but nothing like we'd have gotten if we'd been on the original course. We saw six fighters but no passes were made on us. One fighter was above us out of range and another was right on our altitude out of range. The fighter above us dropped an aerial phosphorous bomb on our formation, obviously setting his timing for the bomb from altitude information from the fighter at our level. We saw the bombs explode, but none were near us to cause any damage. Due to the loss of the gas when the transfer pump reversed, it was evident we could not get to Pairdoba on what we had left. The decision was made to land at Cox's Bazar just inside the Indian border on the Bay of Bengal.

While we were enroute away from the target area, Briner and I crawled from our

position, lugging the electric hoist, into the front bomb bay. While Ross hooked up the hoist, I worked my way under the tanks and Ross fed me the cable with the hook on it, enabling us to crank the bomb bay tanks back into position on the front shackles. Without the gas in those bomb bay tanks we'd have had a hard time reaching Cox's Bazar.

Habe did a beautiful job in landing over the top of the tail of a parked B-29 on that short strip and stopping before we ran into the B-29 sitting on the other end of the runway. While the British were giving us enough gas to get back to Piardoba, we listened to the artillery fire exchange near the perimeter of the field between the British and the Japanese. Taking off to get off the field, our tail skid missed the tail of the B-29 parked at the other end by less than four feet. We got back to Piardoba after being gone for 19:50 hours. Baker's crew came home full of holes, and Vicory, who had been with our crew, had a dud flak shell go through his radar table and map case, exiting through the top of the plane, #694, without exploding.

For the next three weeks, most of our time was spent maintaining #457 and flying training missions in elements of three or four planes, concentrating on tight formations. During this period, there were missions to Singapore and to Rangoon, but "Haberman's ground crew", as we called ourselves, didn't get scheduled. These missions were made with a limited number of planes, probably due to going back to targets we'd already hit. It was almost as if we were running out of targets to hit. Our training hops consisted of 4:55 hours on the 8th, 4:50 hours on the 17th, and 3:05 hours on the 19th, just working on formation flying.

We were notified on the 21st to load bombs and ammo for a mission the next day. Again, I worked the Cat at the bomb dump, loading 25 500lb. bombs for each plane in our squadron scheduled for the mission on the lowboys. After that Briner, Bekritsky, Green and I hoisted the bombs into our bomb bays and loaded the ammo, making us ready to go.

On Thursday, March 22, we were awakened at 0230 and after breakfast went to briefing at 0400 for a mission again to the large Japanese supply depot at Mingaladoon on the outskirts of Rangoon, Burma. Our wheels lifted off the runway a 0644 and we immediately started our climb, heading out over the Bay of Bengal. Getting to our rendezdous point, our element assembled at 22,000 feet with all four planes forming up pretty fast. As a formation, we climbed to 28,000 feet and turned on the IP for the bomb run in a very tight element. Apparently, our element leader was not satisfied with the approach because he signaled the element would not drop on the first run but would go around again for a second run. All of us expected the flak to break loose heavy, but we encountered only light but accurate bursts. No

fighters got to our altitude, which was the highest we'd ever bombed from. I guess the mission could be called a "milk run", but we did pick up a couple of flak holes in #457. The trip back to base was just routine, and we logged 7:15 hours on the trip with good bombing results.

After the Rangoon mission, it seemed all of our routine was spent getting #457 ready to move to the Pacific theater of operations. Since we were told our change of station would be within April, we were to get rid of any excess baggage we had acquired. We continued to practice our formation flying, but we were told to construct a platform to fit into our bomb bay to transport necessary articles from squadron or group headquarters, plus our own items, during the upcoming move. The intent was to move the entire Group in one day to our new location.

On our training flights, we flew 5:05 hours on March 31 again practicing tight formations down over the mouth of the Hooghly River. After maintaining #457 the next two days, we again flew on April 2 for another 2:45 hours.

On April 4, we were given 3-day passes to Calcutta. On arriving there, we enlisted men again checked into the Metropole Hotel and I went to find Eddie. Eddie was at his suite at the Bengal Club and he wasn't feeling well. He was suffering from amoebic dysentary, which had knocked the socks off of him. Our bunch spent our days walking around the city, seeing the sights and going to a movie. One night we ate at Firpo's and another at Winter Garden in the courtyard of the Grand Hotel. We did nothing outstanding but enjoyed the change of scenery. Before leaving, I checked on Eddie, and he was still feeling miserable.

Again on April 12, our crew flew again on a practice formation hop,and apparently the leader was satisfied with the elements' performance because we came back to the field after flying only 1:10 hours. The flight had been made so tight, we felt we could shake hands with the crew of the adjacent plane.

About the middle of April, we had five P-38s move onto our field as part of the outfit which was going to occupy the base when we moved out. I don't recall which group it was, but we took three of the P-38 pilots with us on an engineering hop on April 18, after we'd changed a turbo on #4 engine. The P-38 jockeys commented that the B-29 certainly didn't react as fast on its controls as their planes.

April 26, 1945, arrived! It was my 21st birthday! Lehwalder made the comment I was now an adult, so he guessed he'd better tell me the "facts of life". My retort was I probably

ought to bring him up to date on the "real world". The whole crew wished me well on my birthday, and Green took a pro kit out of his foot locker and gave it to me as a present. Otherwise, the day was like any other as we continued our work on the plane.

In discussions among the crew, we decided to name #457, "Old Acquaintance", since the plane had served in the CBI and was heading to serve in another theater. Haberman sketched the letters on the left side of the plane and all of us painted the letters. We left room above the name to add a picture at a later date, but that picture never got painted. Of course, we already had the Group emblem with the motto, "With Malice Towards Some", on the right side of the nose.

On the 28th, we loaded all our belongings and many boxes and crates from Group headquarters on the platform in the front bomb bay under a bomb bay gas tank. Col. Kalberer came down and asked us to carry his miniature Jeep, made by Crosley. Using straps, we hoisted the small Jeep into the rear bomb bay, hanging the straps on the bomb shackles.

On April 29, 1945, after being awakened at 0400, we got off the ground at 0600, flying over the Hump for the last time to Luliang, China, just outside of Kunming. With the sun still low in the sky, the view of the mountains and valleys through the Hump was a beautiful sight. We landed at Luliang at 1140 hours. After lunch, we changed the prop governor on #2 engine and took in an afternoon movie on the field. After a short nap, we crawled back into "Old Acquaintance", and took off at 1800 hours. Due to the altitude of the field being 6064 feet above sea level, our lift was lessened, so after takeoff we settled into a large erosion canyon to gain speed and lift to full flying speed. To me, it seemed we were below ground level for about five minutes before we started to climb. Once we got altitude, we turned on a course that took us just north of Canton and Hong Kong. We flew through thunderheads most of the night. On our route, we passed a small island, Batan, then we went out over the Philippine Sea, heading for the island of Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands. At 0730 hours on Sunday, April 30, we landed on Tinian, 16:50 flying hours out of Piardoba, India. The twin runways on our arrival were white crushed coral, and the brightness made such a glare I had to squint even with my goggles on. We were directed to our hardstand and we climbed out into a new phase of our flying.

Looking around at all the B-29s parked near the runways, I realized that our crew had been one of the first to do the testing of the aircraft and helped bring it to the reliable plane it had become. I know we had a certain pride in having been the first Wing into combat.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

TINIAN ISLAND IN MARIANA ISLANDS

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Tinian was one of the Mariana Islands formerly owned by Japan. It was invaded and captured by our troops in July, 1944, shortly after Saipan was taken in June, 1944. Unlike Saipan, it was much flatter and much smaller. The Japanese had used Tinian primarily for the growing of sugar. The island was almost 5 miles by 8 miles, 39 square miles, about five miles across the bay from Saipan. The 58th Wing, our wing, and the 313th Wing occupied West Field with dual runways which were 8500 feet long. South of us was a U.S. Navy field.

After we landed, I noticed considerable activity by the Seabees with a great amount of heavy earth-moving equipment working to complete our runways. We enlisted men were taken by truck to our squadron and assigned a tent, after we'd picked up bedding from supply. We immediately noticed we weren't as hot as in India and a constant breeze blew, keeping us comfortable. When we got to the tent, the first thing we did was to find some lumber to build a floor, since the tent was on a slope, and we knew from experience water would be running through the tent if rains came. The floor wasn't very stable, but it worked. I found a wooden crate and attached it to one of the tent poles to give me a place to keep my toilet articles. Our bunks were typical army cots, but by putting our air mattresses on them, we were ready for a good night's sleep.

Within the next few days, the Seabees built a wooden structure for our briefing room. It was amazing how fast that building went up. At a group meeting in the new building, we were pleased to learn we enlisted men would no longer be expected to maintain our own planes, since a Group depot of all ground mechanics and armament personnel had been formed to take care of all the planes. Each plane had its crew chief, and if problems were determined existed on a plane, he would contact the engineering officer who would send in a crew for repairs. All problems discovered in the CFC system would be referred to the armament officer who scheduled a CFC specialist to make the repairs or adjustments. Even under this new

arrangement, I wanted to make certain anyone coming to #457 knew what they were doing. I talked with Jim Gillespie, our armament officer, who assured me I could be on hand to supervise any work done on our plane. As I had previously noted, each man on the B-29s was a specialist. Due to inability of the training schools to turn out men fast enough to continue this practice, new crews coming in from the States had no enlisted specialists. The CFC specialists all became ground personnel to perform their functions, so even a man occupying the position of senior gunner, as I, was only a gunner with no specialized training, just trained as a gunner.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, May 9, we went to a scheduled briefing for a mission to Oshima Oil Storage on the very southern tip of Japan's Kyushu Island. Our bomb load was 20 500lb. GP bombs. Our crew went down to #457 at 0100 and after all preflight checks, we lined up for takeoff on B runway at 0250 on Thursday, May 10, 1945, our first mission from Tinian. Prior to takeoff, we noticed the Seabees had completely blacktopped both runways and had hugh floodlights all night, which we'd been able to see from our tents. At takoff, I noticed the valley off the end of our runway with a slight hill out beyond. At the time, I wondered if any plane would have trouble clearing that hill before flying out over the water. Using the dual runways, we took off thirty seconds after the plane on runway A started their roll. It was obvious that having two runways got the planes into the air faster.

As we came around onto our course, our IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) burned up. The IFF was designed to send out a coded signal to let our forces and allies know we were friendly and not to fire on us. Not having a functioning IFF made us subjected to challenges by any allied forces. Not having one caused us some concern since there were so many naval vessels in that area of the Pacific. However, the outage had no affect on the operation of #457.

At takeoff, we weighed 135,500 pounds, quite heavy. From my position on top and in the moonlight, I reported #3 engine was throwing oil, but it seemed to stop after about two hours. As we hit our rendezvous point, we formed into 4-plane elements and proceeded to the IP where we made our run on the target with excellent results at 1100 hours. As we banked away from the target, I could see oil tanks exploding with flames and smoke reaching 10,000 feet. The flak was moderate but not concentrated, and we saw no fighters. We had no problems on the way back to Tinian, having been in the air for 15:40 hours.

Getting back to our tent after debriefing and dinner, I got some laundry going. I had

gotten a gallon can from the mess hall and filled it with sand. After pouring some 100 octane gas over the sand, I lit it, setting a bucket of water over the flame. I added soap and with my dirty clothes in the water and stirred as the water boiled. Rinsing with clean water, I hung the wet clothes on a line outside our tent to let the breeze dry them. By then, after being up since the previous midnight, I was beginning to fade, so I hit the sack.

By the afternoon of May 11, all of us began to come alive again and deided to to go for a swim in the Pacific. Being warned by some of the men who had already tried it, Briner and I fashioned some sandals out of old rubber tubing and walked down the cliff to the water's edge. There was no sand, just coral and rocks which would cut feet badly if the rubber sandals weren't worn. The water was absolutely beautiful, a dark azure and clear as the air. In the small lagoon, the water lapped the cliffs, so we just floated. Cupping our hands to hold air, we were able to see clearly under the water. The small tropical fish ignored us as we watched with fascination. We were completely relaxed in that environment, and we slept like babies that night.

On May 12, I got a letter from Eddie in India, saying Dr. Walter Hankins of JohnsonCity had come to Calcutta with his medical unit about the same time I left for Tinian. From what Eddie wrote, they were having a fine time together, since they knew each other from Eddie's trips to see Dad before the war. That afternoon, Briner, Schroen, and I went to Tiniantown, or what was left of it, where the ships docked bringing in supplies to the island. With the number of ships unloading, it looked like complete confusion to me. When we checked the bulletin board on the way back to our tent, there was a notice warning all men to travel in pairs when walking to swim, as a Japanese had been spotted in the cane fields we had to go through.

The afternoon of May 13, a notice was posted for our crew to report for a briefing for a mission that night at 2100 hours. "Old Acquaintance" was loaded with 25, 500lb. fire bombs and 500 rounds per gun of ammo. I dropped by the plane with Briner, and we checked the gunnery system out and the ammo loading. Under this new arrangement, it worried me a bit, having someone I didn't know cleaning our guns and setting the cartridges over the holding pawls on the guns. I just wanted to see for myself. At briefing, we found we were heading to Nagoya on Honshu Island, the main island of Japan, at the northern end of Ise Bay. It was Monday, May 14, when we took off at 0145 heading for our target, the industrial and urban area of Nagoya. Enroute, we flew to Iwo Jima, making a slight left turn towards the target area. Off the coast of Japan, we climbed to 19,000 feet and rendezvoused with our element for the run to the IP. Osaka was about five miles to our left, and as we approached we got

attacked by two Nicks, twin engined fighters. One was shot down by another plane and Tommy got one smoking. Both had approached us low into the nose. Just before getting to the target, the flak came up, heavy and accurate. One of our planes from the 770th squadron got hit badly and caught fire. We took a hit in the nose right under Lehwalder's seat, but no material damage was done, except we were unable to pressurize on the way home. At about 0145, we dropped our bombs dead center on the target, and it looked as if the entire center of Nagoya was ablaze with smoking billowing up to 15,000 feet. Turning away from the target, we were jumped by a Nick, a Tony, and a Togo. All attacks came low into the nose, leaving me no shots from the upper guns. Our formations were supposed to have P-51 fighter cover from Iwo, but the weather was so bad at Iwo, they couldn't get off the ground. From what we heard, there were to be about 500 B-29s on this mission and losses were less than expected. Lt. Rookey in #560 had a hole in his wing about three feet in diameter and his bombardier was wounded. We got back to Tinian at 1645 without any trouble after 15:00 hours in the air.

After the Nagoya mission on the 14th, we had little to do on the 15th. I had a letter from Walter Hankins from Calcutta, saying his nurse, Mildred Cooper, was in the Marianas on Tinian at the base hospital. I remembered Mildred when Walter had xrayed my ankle back in 1941. At that time, we weren't allowed to tell anyone where we were located yet, so Walter had made a guess that I was somewhere in the Marianas. After his letter, I bummed a ride to the base hospital, asking if Mildred was there. The receptionist told me Lt. Cooper woud be out shortly, and we had a fine chat on the front lawn. The base hospital was on the only hill on Tinian, overlooking the whole island. It was relaxing there, and Mildred made everyone comfortable to be with. She asked me to drop by anytime. That night, I wrote Walter about seeing her and how much I enjoyed visiting her.

The morning of the 16th, our crew spent time to clean the tent and do our laundry, which was a chore to us. About the only thing we missed from India was having "Lightning" wash our clothes and sweep the barracks. Also, there was no barber in our squadron, so we spent time cutting each others hair with instruments supplied in a tent set aside for that purpose. Some haircuts were decent, while others were hilarious!

There was a mission scheduled for that night, but our crew wasn't on the list to go, so we decided to take in a movie. After dinner, I was walking back towards out tent when Bob Marker, our first sergeant, came down the walk from the briefing room. He said John Kelly had gotten sick at briefing and he had to find a replacement for him before takeoff. I told him I didn't have anything to do, so I'd take the mission, so I headed for briefing. Kelly, whom I

knew, was senior gunner on Till's crew and we'd been associated prior to leaving the States. The mission was a night mission to Nagoya where I'd been with our crew on the 14th. However, on this night mission, we were to drop firebombs at 8600 feet if we got there before 0400 and pull up to 15,000 if we got there after that. Being a night mission, we carried only 125 rounds of ammo per gun. I took off with Till's crew in their plane, #480, "Dream Girl", at 2045 on the 16th and we turned on course to Iwo, again with a slight turn to the left towards Nagoya. On night missions every plane went over the target alone, as formation flying was too hazardous from the standpoint of in-air collisions. Since we arrived in the target area after 0400 on May 17, we pulled up to 11,000 feet and bombed at 0402. The city was already on fire, so we added to it with our firebombs. Searchlights were combing the sky and caught us twice but we ran out of them all right. We saw flak bursts all over the area, but none of it seemed to be too accurate. The radar man threw out aluminum foil, called "chaff", to foul up the Japanese ground radar. Apparently, it helped disorient their guns some. We saw no fighters, although some planes reported seeing a few night fighters. About 200 miles out to sea on the way home, another B-29 pulled up off our wing and turned his landing lights on, scaring the devil out of us. Banner, the left gunner, almost took a shot at the other plane. We landed back on Tinian at 1100 on the morning of the 17th after 14:50 hours in the air. As expected, after debriefing and something to eat, I hit the sack for a nap.

After dinner, Briner and I took in a movie just for something to do. I also got several letters. In those letters I found out Hugo Taliaferro, my McCallie friend, had been liberated from a prison camp in Europe, as that war ended. That made me feel quite relieved, as I had worried about him. Also, Mom wrote me that John James, Ann Cass Carr's husband, had also been liberated from prison camp in Germany. I remember Mom had written me about their marriage earlier before John went overseas a short time earlier.

On Saturday, May 19, the OD woke us up at 0200 for breakfast and briefing for another mission. At briefing, we were told our target was the Tachikawa Aircraft Factory on the outskirts of Tokyo where the Japanese fighter, Oscar, was produced. Our secondary target was to be a radar drop at Hamamatsu where propellers were produced. We took off in #457 at 0430 in the dark, flying our usual route to Iwo, called "Dunkers Highway". That stretch between Tinian and Iwo was called "Dunkers Highway", because so many B-29s had ditched in that leg due to battle damage and running out of fuel coming home from missions. At Iwo, we made our slight turn to the north on course to rendezvous with other planes. After sunrise, we formed with our element of four planes and proceeded towards the target at 20,000 feet when we ran into the highest and thickest cloud front I'd ever seen. The formation had to

disperse to prevent collisions and was told to climb to 27,000 feet. As we broke out, I called Habe telling him another plane was closing on our right and to bank left to prevent a collision. Habe banked in a hurry. I later found out it was Lt. Bartlett's plane which broke out at the same time we did. With the heavy undercast, we flew over Tokyo trying to find a break in the clouds below. There were no breaks, so the decision was made to go to the secondary target at Hamamatsu and bomb by radar. Capt. Holland was leading our formation, which wasn't too good after our battle with the clouds. Apparently, Holland's radar operator messed up and, according to Curran, our radar man, our bombs fell long, probably into the bay past the target area. The weather was so lousy we saw no fighters and no flak, though some crews reported sporatic flak later at debriefing. Coming home, we shepherded Lt. O'Hern's plane back since his entire navigation system had gone out on his plane. We landed at 1930 after 14:30 hours in the air. "Old Acquaintance" had flown well. After debriefing and something to eat, we critiqued the mission among ourselves and went to sleep.

About that time in May, 1945, an order came down from General LeMay, changing the tail markings of all the 58th Wing planes. All the alphabetical letters were taken off and a triangle in black was painted on. Our group had a "U" painted within the triangle. No squadron numbers were put on. The 40th Group had an "S" in the triangle, the 444th had an "N", and the 468th had an "I". Included in the order was the removal of the red rudders of the 462nd Group, our group. Col. Kalberer recognized our feeling of pride in the red rudders, so he flew to Guam to plead our case to keep the red rudders. General LeMay relented somewhat by allowing the planes with red rudders to keep them, but any new replacement planes could not add the red rudders. We felt partially vindicated, since we knew having those red rudders enabled our group to form quicker than others at a rendezvous point due to recognition. Also, after our first mission from Tinian, "Tokyo Rose" had reported our group was then coming from the Marianas instead of China. When we first got to Tinian, we were told not to write that we had moved and to continue using our old APO address until told otherwise. To comply, in my letters, I just wrote "Somewhere" for my location.

The afternoon of May 20, Briner and I wandered down to the hardstand to check on "Old Acquaintance" and to talk with Gay Reed, our crew chief. Reed didn't want any other crews flying our plane, so to prevent it from being taken up for check rides by incoming crews, he kept the spark plugs pulled from at least one of the engines. That way, if asked if the plane was available to fly, he could honestly say it wasn't. Reed also told us there was a "maximum effort" coming up in a few days, according to what the engineering officer told him. "Maximum effort" meant it was expected that every plane in the Group was to be ready for takeoff when

the next mission was called. As expected, Ross and I spread the word as soon as we got back to our tent.

On May 21, Milton "Jigger " James from Baltimore and I went swimming in the beautiful clear water in a small cove. We rigged a pair of goggles to keep the air in and the water out of our eyes, so we could watch the multicolored fish and the coral growth under the water. It was like being in another world.

The afternoon of May 22, the order for a briefing came down scheduled for 1600 on May 23. Knowing it was to be a "maximum effort", we all guessed "Tokyo". With the briefing scheduled so late in the day, we immediately knew the mission would be low level at night, probably carrying firebombs. I talked with several of the CFC men throughout our Group, those of us who had been together in Denver, about having breakfast together the morning of the 23rd. Twelve of us got together at breakfast. Harold Rushford and I caught up on what each of us had done since we were split up at Salina. He and I had bummed around together in Denver and had some good times. It was good to see him again. When the breakfast was over, we all decided to meet again for breakfast on the 25th.

On Wednesday, May 23, 1945, we went to briefing at 1600 in the afternoon, and , sure enough, our target was the south urban area of Tokyo. "Old Acquaintance" was loaded with 34 firebomb cluster bombs. The clusters were designed to explode apart 34 seconds after leaving the bomb bay, scattering small incendiary bombs over a wide area. After dinner, we picked up our gear and reported to #457 at 1830. After the usual preflight checks, we lifted off at 2000 from runway B, turning towards Iwo. We kept running in and out of scattered clouds enroute, nothing unusal. Before we hit landfall, we could see the rosy glow of the burning target from seventy-five miles away. As we hit the IP and turned towards Tokyo, a searchlight locked onto us and within ten seconds about ten other searchlights locked on us. Ross was throwing chaff out the camera hatch in the rear but nothing deterred the lights and the flak began to burst all around us. It was a helpless feeling, knowing the antiaircraft ground guns were concentrating on us. We were at 9500 feet and from my seat on top of the plane I could see how we were surrounded by flak bursts and automatic weapons fire. It seemed to me the heaviest bursts were expoloding around both left engines, and I could hear it rattling off the sides of the plane. Trying to look down was blinding from the lights coming up on us. Tommy opened the bomb bay doors with the searchlights holding us, and everything in the plane lit up with strong light. I could distinguish other B-29s flying just beyond the perimeter of light around us, since they figured with our being caught, the searchlights wouldn't pick them up. We let

our bomb clusters go at 0332 on May 24. Briner and I watched the rear bomb bay clear, but on the intercom we heard Schroen call out that we had "hang-ups" in the front bomb bay, meaning some clusters in the front bomb bay were still with us. It seemed one cluster on the center rack had not left and two from the side rack had tried to drop but were held by the one on the center rack. Knowing we had only 34 seconds before the clusters would explode, Habe gave the plane a heavy snap and the two armed clusters bounced out. Schroen was about to panic. Ross said he saw the clusters explode just as they left the bomb bay under the plane. Green reported a Japanese Nick passed under us but no one shot at it. About that time we ran into the thermal cloud of smoke and heat billowing up from the target area and our tail snapped so hard we thought we'd lost it. Everything got quiet, and Green in the tail thought we'd all bailed out. He started screaming over the intercom, blocking any communications throughout the plane. Curran yelled at me, asking how we could quiet Green, and I told him to just cut the intercom wire to the tail, and he did. The thermals within the black smoke were so strong they were tossing #457 around like a feather. I went from automix to full oxygen flow on my oxygen mask, since I was smelling and tasting the odor of the target fire. It was the sickening sweet smell of death, I felt. Everything loose in the plane, including the floor boards, were floating around within our compartment. I looked for my chest parachute which I had set in the mouth of the tunnel since I couldn't wear it in my seat and it was nowhere to be seen. The plane rolled right and I thought we were going into a complete rollover. Lehwalder and Habe were fighting the controls in that scary environment and we were losing altitude fast. Lee finally convinced Habe to press to the left or we'd be gone, and we slid out level from the thermal at about 2000 feet above the ground. We immediately turned right and headed for the ocean. That maneuver bothered me, as I was afraid other planes coming through the smoke would run into us, since our flight plan had been to fly for five minutes before making our turn. After we got out over the water, Tommy went into the bomb bay with a screwdriver and pried the shackle open to release the bomb on the center rack which had caused our hang ups. In any event, I was as scared as I've ever been in my life, and I felt I had been as close to hell as I ever wanted to be. I was convinced the Good Lord had brought us through this trial. About 200 miles out to sea, we pulled Green out of the tail. He was completely incoherent, so we put him on the bunk in the radar room and he settled down. Since we'd heard nothing from Bekritsky, Briner and I shook him, finding him frozen in his seat with a blank expression, reading his Yiddish prayer book. After we calmed down, we tuned into WXLD out of Saipan, for good music and it made us feel better. We landed back on Tinian after being in the air only 15:55 hours, but it seemed a lifetime! After we parked, we found several flak holes but nothing serious. Coming home, "Bake" had complained the #3 engine's cylinder head temperature was running hotter than normal, so I got a ladder and looked in the air scoop, finding a piece of

newspaper which had apparently come from the ground in the thermal over the target. I took it out and kept it. The crew was totally exhausted and thankful to be back in one piece. Habe sent Green to the hospital for evaluation and a medical checkup. He was released as nothing could be found to be wrong with him.

On the morning of May 25, several of the CFC men arrived for breakfast, as we'd planned. There were ten of us, two had been lost on the Tokyo mission. My friend, Harold Rushford, was one of the missing. Bomber Command announced there were 17 planes lost on the mission from the four wings that participated.

Another mission was scheduled for May 25/26 for the same area of Tokyo, but our crew was unable to go since the holes in #457 couldn't be repaired in time. It took quite a bit of sheet metal work to repair the flak holes we picked up.

The mission we made to Tokyo on May 23/24 was officially the most B-29s over a single target during the entire period of World War II. On that mission, there were 558 planes which took off for the mission, and 520 of them bombed the primary target, Tokyo. 17 planes were lost, and 49 landed at Iwo either from battle damage or low fuel. The two missions to Tokyo on May 23/24 and 25/26 burned out 60% of the target area.

On Friday, May 26, our crew was briefed at Wing Headquarters to fly a search mission to determine if we could locate any of the crews which went down on the two Tokyo missions and might be floating in the Pacific ocean off the coast of Japan. Since #457 was being repaired, we were assigned to fly #459, a "Dumbo", especially equipped with liferafts and survival gear to be dropped if downed men were located. We left Tinian at 0100 early in the morning of the 27th. At daybreak, we let down to 400 feet above the ocean along the route flown by the planes on the last two missions. We flew 20 miles off the Japanese coast and moved closer at the entrance to Tokyo Bay, where we could distinguish the submarine nets across the entrance. North of the entrance to the bay, I saw bursts of antiaircraft fire going off in the air but no danger to us. I reasoned even if they could reach us, they would be unable to depress their guns low enough to get to us. Ross and Bek both saw what looked to be floating garbage near the entrance to Tokyo Bay. We were in the air 15:50 after landing back on Tinian. One other "Dumbo" did find one raft with five men in it and they were successfully rescued. Even without the stress of a mission, we were tired and our eyes burned from searching the ocean due to the reflections of the sun, so we went to bed early.

On May 29, at 0100 in the morning we were briefed for a mission to Yokahoma, loaded with 25 firebombs. "Old Acquaintance" had been repaired and a 150-hour inspection had been made on her, which meant all electric motors and pumps were changed for new ones. She seemed to be running like a dream as we lifted off the runway at 0300. As we approached Iwo, Manny started to transfer fuel from the center wing tank into the wing tanks and found the transfer pumps weren't working. We had no choice but return to Tinian, bringing our bombs back with us. On inspection after landing, it was discovered the new fuel transfer pumps had not been properly connected during the replacement. Also, Habe caught hell for landing with all the bombs aboard instead of jettisoning them. The reason for the rebuke was the fear of what might have happened if we'd crashed at landing with those firebombs. The other planes on the field would have been put at risk. As expected, we got no credit for that mission, due to aborting. We were totallly disgusted again for not being able to complete what we started.

On May 30, I hitched a ride and dropped in to see Mildred Cooper at the hospital. It was so peaceful there and very relaxing. Mildred said she had five patients who had been wounded on the Tokyo missions and all of them would recover. She said all of them would probably be sent back to the States after they left the hospital.

A notice was put on the bulletin board on June 3, stating we could then write we were on a "Pacific Island" and say the island was "consisting of coral and surrounded by the ocean". To me, this directive sounded rather silly, since every news report on radio was saying our B-29s were on Tinian, Saipan, and Guam. The notice further stated we could write "the trees on the island were small and scrubby, but there were very few of them". We all thought it was one of the most ridiculous directives we'd seen!

On June 4, we took #457 up for an engineering hop to be certain all systems were working well, particularly the fuel transfer system, which had caused us so much trouble on the Yokahoma mission. Everything worked fine, and while we were up we got a good look at Rota, a small island adjacent to Tinian. Rota had been bypassed and never invaded since it was of no military value. On our flight around it, we could see Japanese walking around below us. Satisfied with the review of #457's operation, we landed after flying 2:10 hours. As soon as we parked, the armament crew started loading 32 firebomb clusters and telling us we had a briefing that night.

After dinner, we read our mail then gathered our flight gear and went to briefing at 2200 hours. Col. Kalberer opened the briefing saying the upcoming mission was dedicated to the

92nd Seabee Battalion which had done such a great job building a place for us on Tinian. Many of the Seabees attended the briefing with our Group. Our target was Kobe, Japan, on Honshu Island, across Osaka Bay from Osaka. Kobe was one of the largest concentration of the manufacturers of ammunition on Japan. Our job was to burn out the area with firebombs. The weather plane had reported cloud cover over the target, so our bombing altitude was set at only 13,000 feet since we were to bomb by radar. That enabled us to carry more bombs and less gas, not having to use so much fuel climbing to a higher altitude. We got off the ground at 0110, on Tuesday, June 5, 1945, flying on our usual route to Iwo, where we encountered heavy weather and made a slight turn to line up on the run to Kobe. As we flew along, we ran out of the poor weather, and as we approached the Kobe area, there didn't seem to be a cloud within 200 miles of the target area. The revelation of clear weather changed our bombing plan from radar to visual. Calculating our fuel, the best we could do was climb to 15,000 feet so we'd have enough gas to get home, and it also meant the antiaircraft guns at Kobe would pick us up more easily. At the rendezvous point, we formed into 4-plane elements and headed over Awaii Island into Osaka Bay. We were getting fairly heavy flak from both Kobe and Osaka, across the bay. The fighters showed up, coming in mostly into our nose. I saw Oscars, Zekes, and Tonys attacking us. I thought, "These nuts are attacking through their own flak", a most unusual procedure. All our guns were busy firing. We turned on the IP and I saw Cpt. "Shorty" Hull's plane from the 770th Squadron just ahead of us. As our bombs dropped, I saw Shorty Hull's plane get hit in #1 engine. He started to drop down but the fighters went after him so hard, he tried to pull back up almost to our level just as his plane exploded. Pieces of his plane actually came over us, causing me to flinch as a rather large piece came over us. With fighters coming in, I didn't have time to watch Hull's plane, but Briner said seven chutes came out. There was a 313th Group element following us at about 4 o'clock and I saw two of their planes get hit and dive towards the target area, while a third member of that element feathered an engine, turning to head for open water. I know I knocked pieces off three fighters attacking us, but whether they went down or not, I'll never know. The flak chased us as we turned to head away from Kobe, as we were still being shot at from Osaka. Green, our tail gunner, again "blew his stack" over the target, apparently from fear and seeing those planes go down. After we got away from Japan, Briner and I pulled Green out of the tail and this time tied him in the bunk. He was babbling, crying, and making no sense whatsoever. He was still in that condition when we landed back on Tinian. We had been in the air 15:10 hours. As I noted, the mission was dedicated to the 92nd Seabees and we wish they'd flown it! That date, June 5, was also the first anniversary of the first B-29 mission to Bangkok. As we taxiied to our hardstand, Gay Reed, our crew chief, looked at #457 and said, "Boys, you've got to stop putting holes in this plane". An ambulance came and picked up Green, taking him to

the hospital. The next morning, a medic came by the tent and gathered up Green's clothes and belongings. None of the crew ever heard from Green again, but we were told he was shipped back to the States to a hospital. At debriefing, I found out Boxer, whom I'd been with in Denver, had been wounded and someone in his plane killed on the Kobe mission.

After breakfast the next morning, the 6th, Briner and I went down to #457 to see what was being done. Reed said the sheet metal men had worked most of the night, and were about to finish their patching. He commented if we kept getting #457 punched, she would look like a patchwork quilt. He said he couldn't find any serious damage and all the engines checked out fine. While we were there, Gay fired up the auxiliary electrical power, and Briner and I checked the CFC system, finding it in great shape. To relax us, Ross and I took a swim in the afternoon. That night, after receiving two letters from his wife, Mary Louise, Ross got to laughing, since both letters had been written when we were still in India. Also, we found on the Kobe mission, 11 planes were lost and 43 had to land on Iwo with battle damage or lack of fuel. We also saw the notice for a mission on the 7th with briefing at 0300. That triggered our going to bed as early as we could.

The CQ woke us at 0200 on Thursday, June 7, and after grabbing breakfast, we reported to briefing at 0300. Our mission was to Osaka, just a stone's throw across the bay from Kobe. All of us commented that we knew what to expect from that "damn area". "Old Acquaintance" was loaded with 177 100lb. incendiaries of napalm, a different type of firebomb. Our altitude was to be 18,500 feet, making us much more comfortable than at Kobe. Also, a radar bomb run was expected. Takeoff was on runway B at 0610 with #457 turning , as usual, towards Iwo. We made our usual left turn at Iwo, heading along the same route we'd taken last mission. Enroute, we flew through massive thunderheads, bouncing us around and building up static electricity on our props and jumping off our wings. I could hold my finger about an inch from my ring sight and a spark would jump to it. The weather at our assembly point was as bad as we'd seen. In that mess, we were unable to locate our formation, so we formed up with an element from the 769th. The element leader was afraid to fly a tight formation in that weather and he led us over Kobe where we got flak but not too accurate. From all indications, we missed our DP, the IP, and the AP (Departure Point, Initial Point, and Aiming Point). As we turned to make our bomb run, a 313th Wing formation broke out of the clouds above us with their bomb bay doors open. I was looking straight up into their bomb bay, holding my breath, afraid they would drop their bombs on us. I reported the sight on intercom and Habe cussed our leader for leading us into such a mess. With the target socked in, we dropped by radar. Curran was watching the maneuvering on his scope and said he

thought we dropped to the right of our aiming point, but the bombs went into the city all right. Tommy was searching the nose area of 9 to 3 o'clock for fighters, while I was searching the 3 to 9 o'clock, the rear half. A Tony came out of the clouds at 10 o'clock high and dove through the formation with no one picking it up for a decent shot. We should have seen the fighter earlier, even in the weather we were having. With all the maneuvering in that lousy weather, we and other planes had used more fuel than planned. As the result, we had to land at Iwo to pick up enough gas to get us back to Tinian. I heard there were 59 planes which had to take advantage of Iwo for gas. When we landed, Iwo's parking places were at a premium, and planes continued to land. "Bake" detemined our #2 engine, our oldest, had used 280 more gallons of gas than the other three. Finally, at 2210 hours, we got off Iwo and got back to Tinian at 0210 on the 8th. We were pooped! Our time in the air had been 16:45 hours. Chick Goodwin flew with us as tail gunner in Green's seat. In all that comedy of errors, #457 had behaved beautifully. At debriefing, we found that no one had been able to follow the planned aspects of the mission due to weather.

After finally getting back from Osaka, we hit the sack as quickly as possible after debriefing. When we woke and went to breakfast, damned if we hadn't been put on guard duty for that night. Some clerk had no idea which crews had been on missions and which hadn't. We wanted to wring his neck. Standard procedure was to give at least 24 hours off after a mission to relax. So much for SOP!

On June 9, we were told to report to our plane, as General LeMay was coming to Tinian to review our planes and the Group. The crew hung around #457 until the general drove up with B/Gen. Roger Ramey, the 58th Wing commander, and Col. Kalberer. The group stopped at our hardstand, probably because #457 was one of the few planes left with the red rudder still remaining. LeMay walked around the plane and questioned our crew chief, Gay Reed, about all the patches, some of which were pretty roughly done. Reed explained the patches had been hurriedly done to keep the plane flying for the next mission. LeMay turned to Ramey saying it looked like it was about time to get us a new plane. Ramey asked the engineering officer if a new plane was possible, and the reply was, "As soon as possible". After the generals left, our crew discussed that we were happy with #457, but a new one would be great if it was a good one.

The next day, the 10th, all of us got industrious and dug up all the weeds around our tent and generally cleaned the place. I had to admit I didn't realize how unkept the area looked. We all agreed it was a good idea after reviewing our work. Even Bob Marker, our F/Sergeant

who saw it wanted to know what prompted our actions. We'd even gotten rocks and painted them white to line the walk into the tent, prompting men in other tents to raise cain, being afraid they would have to do the same thing.

Habe and Lee came by our tent on Monday, June 11, to tell us #457 was being replaced to be sent back to the States for training purposes. We went to the line to clean out any personal items we usually kept in "Old Acquaintance". As we removed jackets, boots, pictures, parachutes, and other items, we couldn't help feeling we were losing a close friend. It was a great plane, needing only some cosmetic "surgery" on her skin to smooth out the hastily patched places.

The next morning, June 12, a brand new B-29, #42-63569, was towed to our hardstand and "Old Acquaintance" was pulled away. The new plane was a real beauty with all the latest equipment and modifications on it. It was a Model 30, built at Boeing Marietta, Georgia, the same place #457 had been built. The navigation equipment was the newest, and for us gunners, there were round counters, telling us how many shells we had left after firing. We hated to see #457 go, but we appreciated #569, "General LeMay's Gift", as we enlisted men called it among ourselves. After checking out the new plane, we were anxious to get her on a mission to see how she flew. The next day when Ross and I went to the plane, the painters were busy putting the large triangle with the "U" in it on the dorsal fin. We asked the painters if they could paint the rudder red for us, but they just laughed at us. On the 13th, we flew #569 for 2:00 hours to check out her flight characteristics.

After breakfast on the 14th, we received notice of a briefing at 2200 that night for our crew. Having time on our hands until the night briefing, Ross and I took a swim in the morning and did our laundry that afternoon before dinner. At briefing at 2200, Col. Kalberer opened the meeting saying the original plan for this mission was to go back to Yawata, where the first B-29 mission to Japan was held exactly a year ealier. However, the weather was so bad over Kyushu Island, the mission was changed to Amagasaki. Our bomb load would be firebomb clusters. Amagasaki was a city of about 250,00 people between Kobe and Osaka in which there was a large warehouse area, containing Japanese war materials for distribution. Partially clear weather was expected over the target, and we were to fly in 4-plane elements. Going to #569 at 2330 to perform the necessary preflight checks, we got the green light for takeoff at 0100 on June 15, 1945. On our course towards Iwo, I could see other planes in the bright moonlight from my seat. Prior to reaching our rendezvous point, the sun broke the horizon in the east about 0600. As we hit the rendezvous point off the coast, we quickly

formed up in our element and headed towards the target area, just as we hit absolutely terrible weather from a strong weather front. The formation had to split up fast. Losing visual contact with the other planes, it was decided we would bomb the target alone at 16,000 feet, running in and out of clouds, one minute seeing the ground and the next minute seeing only clouds. Tommy did get a visual view of the target for a good bomb drop. Both he and Briner saw the bombs go into the target with exellent results. Even though we saw no fighters and no flak, the mission was a "sweat job", dodging other B-29s in the clouds. Chick Goodwin again rode with us as our tail gunner. We landed back on Tinian, having been gone for 14:40 hours. Our new plane, #569, ran extremely well, and we had a little over 800 gallons of gas left when we got back, indicating what a economical plane she was.

Shortly after debriefing, our crew attended a meeting of the 58th Wing where General "Hap" Arnold, the Commander of all U.S. Air Forces, presented our wing with the Presidential Unit Citation for our work in the CBI.

As if everyone at home didn't know it, on the 17th a notice was posted that we could tell the people in the States we were on Tinian. Since every newscast on radio and every newspaper story had been reporting stories of our raids from Tinian, it was hardly anything to write home about. With that notice, there was another one telling us we had a briefing at 1600 that afternoon.

After a visit to #569 and lunch, our crew reported to the briefing hall at 1600 on June 17. Our mission was a night firebombing one to Omuta, about 23 miles from Omura, on the lower island of Kyushu's west coast. The target consisted of chemical works, parts factories, and other small industries. The population of the city was about 180,000 people. After briefing we grabbed a quick dinner and went to #569 for final preflight checks. At 1855, we got off the ground on the 17th, setting course to Iwo, then turning towards Kyushu. For a change, we didn't have to fight our way through a weather front, so we had a smooth ride to the target area. Going in to the target, we could see the fires already starting on the ground below. As we dropped our clusters at 0230 on the 18th, we could see the wooden frames of the buildings blazing, as we bombed at 6000 feet. A few bursts of light flak came up off our left wing, but we saw no fighters. Making our turn away from the target, Briner reported our bombs were "on the money". Landing back on Tinian, Bake said we had 1100 gallons of gas left, indicating what a great plane #569 was. Again, Chick Goodwin flew the tail for us. We logged 15:55 hours on that mission. After debriefing and some lunch, we went back to our tent to try to sleep. Due to the noise of the daytime activity, we gave up on sleeping and took a swim.

On the 19th, we just relaxed and I went to the hospital to see Mildred Cooper. It was a beautiful relaxing afternoon and I got there as she was finishing her shift, so we just watched some B-29sof the 73rd Wing taking off from Saipan and from the 313th Wing on our field, heading out for somewhere on a night mission. Going back to my tent, several of us took in a movie that night.

On the 20th, our crew flew a training exercise, practicing formation flying with six other planes. The flight leader kept asking the formation to "tighten up", but I felt if we got any tighter, we'd be flying piggy back with each other. We flew for 3:40 hours, and that night we enlisted men agreed there must be a daylight mission coming up to cause that work in formation.

For breakfast on the morning of the 21st, Ross and I went up to the Seabees' area, just adjacent to ours and ate with a couple of navy men we'd met. It was great! Each Seabee squad had their own cook tent with their own cooks. Fresh eggs, not powdered ones, were prepared in any fashion ordered, plus there was fresh fruit available. If anything, I ate too much, and I felt bloated when we finished, but it was so good. To our delight, we were invited back anytime. The navy certainly ate well!

Coming back to our squadron area, we found we were scheduled for a briefing at 2300 that night. Immediately, we knew it would be a day mission. That afternoon, we tried to get some sleep, with little success, but after dinner that evening, we did sneak a nap before reporting for the briefing.

At briefing at 2300, it was obvious why we practiced close formation flying. Our target was the naval arsenal at Kure, which produced Japanese antiaircraft guns, naval guns, radar, and other weapons. Situated on the Iyo Sea between Shikoku and Honshu Islands, Kure was a city of about 160,000 people and was a large anchorage for Japanese naval vessels. Our bomb load was 8 1000lb demolition bombs, and our bombing altitude was set for 18,000 feet. Our guns were to carry 500 rounds per gun, meaning we could expect opposition from fighters. We took off at 0300 in the dark in the early morning of Friday, June 22. After our usual run by Iwo, we headed towards the target area. After sunrise, we rendezvoused, forming into a large formation of fourteen planes. To reach Kure, we passed over Shikoku Island to the IP, which seemed peaceful enough, then all hell broke loose. The flak batteries on shore cut loose at us at the same time two battleships and two heavy cruisers in the harbor started blasting us. The flak was thick enough to walk on and it was extremely accurate. All I could see was orange bursts all around us. We attracted several hits with one above

Tommy's head about the size of a baseball in the nose and another heavy one tearing into the shroud of #4 engine's supercharger. If that piece had hit two inches lower, it would have hit the bucket wheel and probably caused a fire. The whole formation dropped their bombs on the lead plane, and Briner reported all seemed to go into the heart of the target area, but two of ours hung up and didn't release. As we turned away from the target, we fully expected to be jumped by fighters, but surprisingly none showed up, even though we saw them at a distance. After we got away from Japan and out over the ocean, Tommy went in the bomb bay and manually dropped the hangups. O'Donnell rode with us as our tail gunner. We landed back at Tinian after 15:00 hours in the air. We had several holes from flak in #569 but no serious damage. At debriefing, we found that nine of our squadron's eleven planes on the mission were hit, but no one was hurt. In the Wing, of the 195 planes that took off, 162 bombed the primary target of Kure. Two planes were lost to enemy actions and ten planes landed at Iwo on the way back due to fuel problems or battle damage. Shortly after dinner that night, we hit the sack. We were rather tired!

After a good night's sleep, I felt fine, so I did my laundry after breakfast. Ross and I planned to go to a movie that night, but damned if we didn't get called for guard duty. As anyone could expect, we "bitched" about it, since the same thing had happened to us before after a mission.

On the morning of the 24th, Angus McWhorter, our armament chief, asked me if there was any way he could be checked out as a gunner. I suggested he talk with Lt.Col. Rosebush, our squadron CO. I told him, if Col. Rosebush approved, I would instruct him and help him to get checked out, provided Habe approved also. I asked Habe about it, and he approved, providing I instruct Angus. Rosebush okayed the deal, but he did say someone other than I would have to make the final check out, since I was doing the instruction.

Angus and I planned on meeting after breakfast on the 25th, but a notice was posted for us to attend a briefing that night. Instead of starting gunner instruction, I went to #569 to check out the gunner system, while Angus and his crew started bringing our bombs and ammo to the plane for loading. Everytime we had a late night briefing, we knew it meant we'd have a daylight mission after leaving Tinian in the dark. The briefing was called for 0100, an hour after midnight. Even though we had time for a short nap before briefing, I couldn't get my mind off the upcoming mission, so I slept little. At 2330 on the 25th, the OD came by to shake us out of our cots. We had a light snack, gathered our gear, and reported to briefing at 0100 on the 26th. Our target was at Osaka, a aluminum plant which stamped out 60% to 70% of all the

propellers for Japanese aircraft. The bombs to be carried were three 4000lb. demolition ones. Looking in the bomb bay, when I got to the plane, I was amazed how full our bomb bays were with just three bombs. Taxiing out, we got off the ground at 0355 on the June 26 in a beautiful clear black sky. After going by Iwo and making our turn, we reached our rendezvous point well after the sun came up, but just as we got there a weather front moved in destroying any possibility of making our bombing run in formation. We climbed to our assigned altitude of 19,000 feet, but the heavy clouds were up to 22,000 feet, so we started to climb more and found our supercharger on #1 engine was inoperative. We could get only 20 inches of manifold pressure on #1, so we had to climb on three engines. Flying alone, we started our bomb run, counting on using our radar to hit the target with our 4000 pounders. Just as the bomb bay doors came open, we broke into clear weather over the target. Pronto! The flak came up. Being alone, the Japanese concentrated on us with their fire. It almost looked like the flak bursts were hitting inside our bomb bay before the bombs dropped. One large piece of flak went through our right tail stablizer, leaving a hole about ten inches in diameter. I could hear and feel the flak bouncing off #569. Tommy let the bombs go at 1108 and two minutes later we were jumped by a Japanese Frank fighter which came out of the clouds at 2 o'clock low on a pursuit curve. Bek got a shot at it as it turned off. Another firghter, a Zeke, came in at 2 o'clock high, giving me a burst at it, but it never came close enough for any real damage to be done. At the coastline, Habe feathered #1 engine and we turned towards Iwo, thinking we might have to go in there. Getting to lower altitude, #1 engine was restarted and it ran all right all the way back to Tinian, since the turbo wasn't necessary at low altitude. We touched down at 1830 hours, having been in the air for 15:15 hours. O'Donnell again rode as tail gunner with us, and Habe told him he must have a magnet in his ass, because every time he rode with us we picked up flak holes. Gay Reed, our crew chief, started fussing as we swung onto the hardstand. He claimed we were just making his job harder, picking up all the flak holes. After debriefing and something to eat, we fell into our cots by 2100 hours.

On the morning of the 27th, our crew was notified we'd have to move our tent to the rear of our tent area, since the decision had been made to build metal quonset huts for barracks where our tent was. Our tent was 38' X 18'. First, we had to take the tent itself down, then came the wooden floor we'd built. With the help of others in the squadron, about fifty of us surrounded the wooden floor and picked it up, walking it to the new area. After leveling the floor with blocks, we reset the tent over it. By dark, everything was in place, but we were pooped.

On the 28th, I worked some more with Angus McWhorter, then notified F/Sgt. Bob

Marker I felt Angus was ready to be checked out as a gunner. Angus told me later he'd been told to go to Doc Dyer for a flight physical before being checked out and receiving flight pay.

On cleaning up around our new tent area on the 28th, Ross and I took off for a swim before lunch. After lunch, a notice was posted for us to report for a briefing at 1900, after dinner. That afternoon, I went down to #569 to check the gunnery system and to see the loading of the bombs and ammo. Only 125 rounds per gun were being put aboard, while there were 32 firebomb clusters, E-48s, being hoisted into the bomb bay. All of this indicated we were scheduled for a night mission.

At briefing at 1900, we found we were heading that night for Okayama, Japan. It was not to be confused with Okayama, Formosa, which we bombed twice on October 14 and 16, 1944. Okayama, Japan, was an industrial city of about 150,000 people between Kure and Kobe on the Inland Sea. After briefing, we got our gear together and went to #569 where all the preflight checks were made. At 2105, the evening of June 28, 1945, we took off, cruising north to Iwo at 6800 feet. The weather didn't look too good, and we thought we might have to bomb by radar. Cutting across Shikoku Island, we had already reached our bombing altitude of 11,800 feet when the weather broke clear for us. Turning on our IP, we could see the target area burning ahead. Tommy dropped our firebomb clusters from 11,800 feet at 0417 in the early morning of June 29. Ross said the bombs were in the middle of the target area and started burning well. As we turned away from the area, it began to get grey in the east, and we saw two fighters go beneath us in the opposite direction. Surprisingly, we saw no flak, but we saw what looked to be rockets fired from the ground. Walter Price flew as our tail gunner with Angus McWhorter to check Angus out. As we got back over the ocean, the moon faded and the sun came up. We landed back on Tinian after 14:40 hours in the air. At debriefing,one of our other planes reported seeing a B-29 blow up over the target, but no one on our crew saw it.

The past two months had been fast and furious, as we realized we had spent about 100 hours in combat in May and then in June logged over 114 hours. At the end of June, 1945, those of us on our original crew had completed 29 combat missions out of the required 35.

Looking forward to a day of rest on June 30, Ross Briner, "Jigger" James, and I went swimming in the morning, getting back to the tent in time for lunch. Checking the bulletin board, we found ourselves scheduled for guard duty that night. It was hard to figure how we got caught so often, particularly on the nights following missions.

Coming off guard duty on June 30, Ross and I skipped breakfast at our mess hall and went to the Seabees cook tent on July 1 and got well fed. The Seabees food was really something to brag about.

Passing the orderly room, we checked the bulletin board and found we were scheduled for another briefing at 1430 hours, that afternoon of July 1. With an afternoon briefing, we knew it would be another night mission. At the briefing, the route was familiar to us, since we were going back to Kure. Our bomb load was 187 M-69 firebombs of napalm and the target was the airbase area and Danny Cullinan was to fly as tail gunner with us. Leaving briefing, we went to #569 to check the gunnery system and check the ammo loading. After the preflight checks, we took off at 1730 hours, taking our usual route to Iwo to make our turn as the sun set. Everyone remembered our previous trip to Kure,so we were "sweating out" the same type of reception, since that was our 30th mission. Thinking of missions as a game ceased long ago and we considered every one as a life-threatening event. Crossing Shikoku Island, we lined up on the bomb run, finding the area covered by clouds. We could see searchlights trying to penetrate the clouds but were unable to do so. We were flying at only 10,000 feet and the glow from the burning target made the clouds have a rosy glow. Flak was meager as Habe set up for a radar drop with #569 on a slight step, meaning we would be in a slight downhill run towards the target at 10,000 feet. Our indicated air speed rose to 260 knots as we dropped at 0120 in the early morning of July 2. The trip back to Tinian was uneventful and we landed after 14:55 hours in the air at 0740 with the sun bearing down on a hot day on July 2, 1945. We were surprised at the lack of opposition. At debriefing, we found no other plane had any opposition either, but several landed at Iwo from mechanical problems or lack of fuel. After breakfast, we went to our tent to try to take a nap, if possible. "Bek", our left gunner was complaining of feeling sick and said he was going to see Doc Dyer. Later that afternoon, Bekritsky came back to the tent, saying he was being put into the hospital.

On the morning of July 3, Briner, Schroen, Curran, and I went to breakfast and decided to hitch a ride to the hospital to see Bekritsky. Getting a ride in a 6' X 6' truck, we got to the hospital where I asked to see Mildred Cooper for information, but she wasn't on duty. We then asked where Bek's room was, but the receptionist couldn't find his name listed. At our insistence, a further check was made and we were told Bek had been flown out that morning. Whether he had been flown to Guam or to the States, we never found out. Before we finished our missions, no one ever heard from him. Bek just disappeared!

At noon, we checked the bulletin board and saw again we were posted for a briefing at

1730 in the afternoon. Ross and I went to #569 to see what kind of load we'd be carrying and to make a quick check on the gunnery system. We found 40 500lb. firebombs were being hoisted into the bomb bays. Ross and I discussed that the bomb load was a little greater than we'd carried before. Ross mentioned that #569 was so effecient we'd been coming home with more reserve of gas than most planes, so they probably decided to add more bombs. At briefing, we found we were going to Takamatsu, a city of about 125,000 people, on Shikoku Island's north side of the Inland Sea, across from Okayama, which we bombed two missions ago. It was an important transportation center where all the railroads on Shikoku terminated so war materials could be ferried across the Inland Sea to the main island of Honshu. Our target was the industrial area and marshalling yards. Dan Cullinan rode as tail gunner with us again, and Fred Darby of Niagra Falls, New York, was taking Bekritsky's left gunner spot. We took off on runway B at 2030 on July 3, taking our usual route towards Japan. At the DP, we had to dodge three other B-29s reaching there about the same time as we at 10,000 feet. The weather over the target area was hazy, so visibility at night was not too good. Smoke was billowing up from the fires at the target, so we dropped our "eggs" through the haze by radar at 0441 and had to fly through the smoke which gave us a few bumps. As we left the target area, another B-29 almost chewed our tail off, but Cullinan had seen the plane and notified Habe so both planes turned away from each other. We saw some light flak and some automatic weapons fire but nothing that amounted to anything. In the distance, we could see other targets being hit by other groups. Coming home, we had no further incidents. We landed after being in the air 15:15 hours on July 4, 1945, an appropriate date for fireworks. At debriefing, Doc Dyer made the comment to our crew that we were flying too much and he might have to ground us for awhile. We asked him to hold off, as we had only four more missions to pull.

On July 5, Gene Haberman was notified of his promotion to captain. We all gave him our congratulations, saying we felt it was past due. Of course Habe was delighted with the two bars on his collar.

With a day of rest, Ross and I went swimming just to relax and get the kinks out of us, getting back in time for noon chow. The breeze had picked up which cooled things off some in the tent with all the flaps up. We cleaned the tent area and boiled our laundry. We went to a movie after dark, but it was so lousy, I went back to the tent. I fully intended to read some but the beeze was so strong, it kept blowing out the candle. Rather than using the batteries in my flashlight, I gave up and went to sleep.

Again, on the morning of the 6th, Ross and I went swimming after breakfast, having

found out the warm water relaxed us and took the tired feeling out of us. When we got back for lunch, we were greeted with a notice of a briefing at 1730 that afternoon. Going down to #569, we again saw 40 500lb. firebomb clusters being loaded. Again, our ammo was only 125 rounds per gun. At briefing, we found our target was Chiba, a city of 130,000 people, just 23 miles across Tokyo Bay from Tokyo. It was a highly industrialized city with heavy warehousing. After briefing, we ambled down to #569 to recheck everything and perform the preflight checks. At 2037, we lifted off, taking our route over Iwo towards our target. As we turned on the IP, meager flak came up but nothing serious. The target was covered by clouds but the fires already blazing cast a rosy glow on the clouds. At 0324, July 7, we dropped by radar from our assigned altitude of 10,000 feet and immediately climbed to 14,000. On the bomb run, we had a heavy tail wind, giving us a ground speed of about 300 knots over the target. Angus McWhorter rode with us as tail gunner, and Roger Metz from Franklin, Tennessee, rode the left gunner position. We came home a bit slower due to bucking a headwind, but #569 ran beautifully. After 14:10 hours in the air, we landed at 0725 on the 7th. At debriefing, some planes said they saw fighters, but we saw none. After debriefing, we got breakfast and hit the sack to sleep until lunch. We'd been asleep for a short time when what felt like someone stomping across our wooden floor woke us up. Both Briner and I sat up about to raise hell with whomever was walking so heavy when we realized no one was there. About that time, the floor rattled again, and we recognized it was a mild earthquake shaking us.

That night of the 7th, I went down to the maintenance group to have dinner with Bill Manning, whom I had known from Chattanooga and who had worked for Reed Murphy there. Both were McCallie graduates, with Bill graduating in 1932. We enjoyed our chat, and Bill was to come up to have dinner with me on the 12th.

During the night, the wind came up and the rain belted down, causing us to get up to let the flaps down on the tent to prevent wetting our cots. Dixie Schroen was sleeping so hard he never did wake up. By morning, things had settled down but scuds of clouds drifted on the wind across Tinian. During the afternoon of the 8th, nearly everyone spotted a large waterspout wiggling its way from the ocean towards landfall very slowly. The word went out that all crews were to stand by, ready to fly their planes to Guam if the waterspout was about to hit the island. We stood on the cliffs and watched as mobile antiaircraft guns were moved near us on the cliffs. The barrels were lowered and the gun crews fired along the waterspout from bottom to up the spout. Within minutes of that blasting, the waterspout broke up and disintegrated. Never before or since had I heard or seen such a procedure.

July 9 was a day of leisure, cleaning up and getting our laundry done. It was a breezy, comfortable day! Ross and I planned on a trip to Tiniantown, but after breakfast a notice appeared calling us to briefing at 1430, shortly after lunch, so we hurried down to #569 to check the plane. Being loaded were 184 napalm firebombs. A quick check of the CFC system showed everything in order. At briefing, we found we were going to Sendai, about 200 miles north of Tokyo on the eastern coast of Honshu, the main Japanese island. It was a rail transportation center and the home of textile, ordinance, and aircraft works. Sendai had a population of about 300,000 people. After briefing, we gathered our flight gear and went to #569 for the preflight checks. We taxied out behind #531, Lt. Surelock's plane, to take off on runway B. From my seat in my dome, I watched as #531 started to roll for takeoff and about half way down the runway their #3 engine blew, catching fire. The crew tried to stop but the plane ran off the runway and started to burn, blocking us from taking off. We had to turn and taxi over to runway A, working our way into line with the 468th Group for takeoff. We finally got off the ground at 1734, a bit late. Enroute to Iwo, Habe called on the intercom to let our crew know that everyone on #531 had gotten out of the crackup all right. Nearing the coast of Japan, we flew parallel to the eastern coast quite a way before getting to our IP and turning towards our target. As we hit landfall,the searchlights and flak came up at us. In their waving search, the lights swung over us and passed on several times without locking. The flak was fairly heavy but not too accurate. I did see one plane get caught in the searchlights and seemed to be blasted pretty good by flak. Since the weather was good, Tommy dropped our bombs visually from 10,000 feet at 0131 on July 10. Curran was watching through the rear camera hatch and reported excellent results, seeing our bombs go right into the target area on the left side of a street where no fires were burning. A large smoke cloud had built up from the burning target and we had no choice but to fly through it. The thermal within the smoke was rough and bounced us around quite a bit, but it was nothing like the Tokyo mission. Due to the heavy smoke, I had to switch over to pure oxygen to keep the smoke out of my mask. As we banked away from Sendai, the whole city seemed in flames. No fighters were seen in the area. Tom Walsh from Auburn, New York, flew with us as left gunner, and Stan Lewison from Granite Falls, Minnesota, rode the tail position. Our #569 continued to operate like a dream and was getting to be quite a veteran. After 15:55 hours in the air, we landed back on Tinian at 0930 hours on July 10. Having completed 33 missions, we were getting a little jumpy and talking about our odds on the next two trips. Leaving debriefing, I hit the sack for a nap, but all the noise from the construction of the new quoset huts being built made sleep impossible.

I ran into Parker Sutherland from Johnson City and we chatted a few minutes. I had seen him before shortly after he arrived from the States. He said he was getting his mission

count up, so his time to complete his tour probably wouldn't take as long as mine, since he didn't have to go through the B-29 development stage in the CBI. He was flying as a flight engineer. In the mail, I had a letter from Cliff Beasley, my old roommate at W & L, and he had been wounded and was still in France, though V-E Day had come and gone. That night Curran and I went to the mess hall and wrote letters since there were electric lights there and we wouldn't disturb the rest of the bunch.

For the next three days, we really caught up on our rest, not being scheduled for anything. The weather was clear and hot, but at least there was a breeze blowing. Each morning several of us went swimming, which helped us relax, and we also read anything we could get our hands on. I ran into Bob Marker, our first sergeant, who told me the weather was so bad over Japan that nothing was scheduled. He said one planned mission had already been scrubbed, which explained why we were on the ground for such a stretch. On Saturday, July 14, we did take #569 up for an engineering hop for 2:45 hours to check out some preventative maintenance repairs which had been made. Most of the flight was spent circling Rota and the vicinity at low level.

After the engineering flight, all of us discussed that we had not named #569 and we needed a name painted on the nose before we completed our tour of missions. Several names surfaced, but none could be totally agreed upon, so we decided to think about it some more in order to have the name put on before our last mission. I suggested, with my tongue in my cheek, that we could call #569, "Curt's Gift", since General Curtis E. LeMay had gotten the plane for us, but on review even I thought it sounded too much like "ass kissing"!

After a restful morning on the 15th, F/Sgt. Bob Marker caught me at lunch and pulled me aside. He said for me not to be upset when I got orders transferring me to the 769th Squadron on the afternoon of the 16th. He explained I would be officially there only until the afternoon of the 17th. I was not to physically move from where I was, as the move was being done for a technical reason. He didn't tell me why I'd move, but said he would explain later.

On the morning of July 16, we were posted for a briefing at 1630 that afternoon. After lunch Ross suggested that we go for a swim and I facetiously told him I should go swimming with my new squadron members in the 769th. Ross said, "Like Hell!", and we went for a short swim, dropping by #569 to see what kind of bomb load we'd be carrying that night. We watched 40 E-46 incendiary clusters being loaded for a few minutes, then went to briefing.

Our target for that night was Numazu, a city of about 100,000 people, situated at the north end of Suruga Bay on Honshu Island, about sixty miles from Yokohama. Our bombing point was the urban industrial area of the city. Bob Higdon of Denver, Colorado, rode as left gunner, and Angus McWhorter had the tail position. Picking up our flight gear after briefing, we went to #569 for the preflight checks. I noticed we weighed 137,000 pounds all loaded. We taxied out and took off runway B at 1930. Right after takeoff, we found #2 prop governor was stuck at 2400 rpm. Habe and Lee made the decision not to abort the mission, since the engines were running well, so we continued on towards the target, via Iwo. Approaching the target, flying up Suruga Bay at 10,800 feet, we had a heavy undercast, so the decision was made to bomb by radar. Searchlights scanned the clouds trying to break through without sucess. The flak was moderate but it was bursting below us on our line. Our bombs cleared the bomb bay at 0224 on July 17. The glow of the burning city below us could be seen, but we had no visual look at the city. With #2 engine running at such a high rpm for the entire distance and using an unusual amount of fuel, we were forced to land at Iwo to pick up enough gas to get us back to Tinian. After landing on Iwo and parking, a Jeep pulled up to #569 and served us coffee and donuts while we waited for fuel, giving us all quite a surprise. George Clark made the comment that all we needed were dancing girls! Getting back to Tinian, we'd logged 14:55 flight hours on our mission #34, leaving one mission to go.

As we left debriefing, Bob Marker brought me my orders transferring me back to the 768th squadron. He also notified me that I had been promoted to technical sergeant. He explained that our squadron commander, Lt. Col. Bob Rosebush, had been trying to promote me but the 768th had its full complement of tech sergeants, which prevented the promotion of anyone to that rank. To circumvent that problem, Col. Rosebush talked with Col. Durbin of the 769th who told him they had an opening and did not intend to use it at present. By the transfer, Col. Durbin was able to promote me to tech sergeant and then transfer me back to the 768th, making everything legal. As I walked by to my tent, I dropped by to thank Col. Rosebush.

After grabbing some lunch, we tried to take a nap, but the construction noise made that fruitless, so Ross and I went for a swim. We discussed that our crew was then in the "option zone", having completed 34 missions. Our understanding was that a crew having finished 34 missions had the option of taking the next scheduled mission or could skip one and take the mission after that. It was a pure "crap shoot", since the crew had no idea where either mission was going. Apparently, this option was purely psychological, so the crews would feel they had a choice.

Since Major Fawcett, the intelligance officer, had flown with us in the move from Piardoba to Tinian, it was thought we might get some clue on what was coming up. Lee, I believe, talked with him, and was given the information that the next mission would be a short time over land and back over water quickly. I ran into him and also asked and was told the same thing. We decided what he said would indicate a "milk run", so we elected to take the next upcoming mission.

On the morning of the 18th, I told Ross I had some film and had borrowed a camera, so I was going down to #569 to get some pictures of the plane. I asked him to go with me, but he said he had to write some letters, but he wanted some of the pictures. Getting to our hardstand, the plane wasn't there but Gay Reed was. Gay said his normal procedure was to keep the plugs out of at least one engine to keep the plane fom being flown for the checking out of new crews coming in from the States. He said that morning, the engineering officer asked if #569 was ready to fly, thinking there was a mission called. He was told the mission had been scrubbed, and #569 would fly to check out a new crew with an old crew evaluating the new one. Reed said there wasn't anything he could say, so the check ride was in progress as I showed up. I waited with Reed for about a half an hour until we saw #569 coming in for a landing. As the plane began to settle just at touchdown, the left wing dropped causing the props of #1 and #2 engines to plow into the runway. Instead of chopping the throttles, Lt. Magaha, the pilot, apparently tried to add power to go around again. That resulted in #569 gaining some altitude, while the power on engines #3 and #4 pulled the plane into a left diving turn into the hill off runway A. The explosion was immediate as the plane hit, completely destroying #569 and killing all sixteen men aboard. Gay and I were dumbfounded! The only pictures I got were of a blackened area on the side of the hill, showing no large pieces of #569. Bob Higdon, who had flown with us to Numazu on our last mission, was killed in the crash as a checkout gunner. When I got back to the tent and told the others what had happened, they too were "floored". Things got awfully quiet around our tent that afternoon. Not only did we mourn the loss of #569, but we mourned the crews and particularly Bob Higdon.

On the morning of July 19, we were listed for a briefing at 1430, shortly after lunch. Not having a plane due to the loss of #569, our crew was assigned plane #076 (42-94076), a model 30, built in Renton, Washington, where the Seattle Boeing plant was. Ross and I went down to take a look at #076 before briefing and found her being loaded with 40 firebomb cluster bombs. I checked the CFC system and it worked all right. Even though #076 looked good, our crew was superstitious about flying an unknown plane, particularly on our final mission. Walter Haskell from Tanton, Massachusetts, was assigned to be our left gunner, while Angus

McWhorter took the tail spot. At briefing, we saw our target would be Fukui, a city of 100,000 people on the western coast of Japan on the Sea of Japan. Our whole crew turned their eyes towards Major Fawcett who opened his palms, mouthing, "a mission change". Going to Fukui meant flying completely across Honshu Island and back, certainly no "milk run". Our target was to be the urban area of the city where the manufacturing was located. After briefing, we picked up our flight gear and headed for #076. Being a different plane to us, we spent a little extra time on the preflight checks. At 1744, we took off from runway B and passed Iwo just as the sun was setting. Our route to the target took us between Osaka and Nagoya, and after hitting landfall, we could see the fires from Osaka where the 315th Wing was bombing. Getting across Honshu Island, we started towards the IP and heard Habe and Lee talking on the intercom that they were having trouble controlling the direction and elevation at 12,000 feet, our bombing altitude. Shortly, the problem was corrected. In order to get weight forward in the plane, Curran had gone to the front compartment. We were told later that Clark had asked Curran to cage the compass for him, and in doing so, Bill's parachute harness had raked across the switch on the automatic pilot, turning it on without anyone's knowledge. This meant Habe and Lee we having to overcome the auto pilot to make their corrections. Once they saw the problem and turned the auto pilot off, everything returned to normal. Tommy let our bombs go at 0100, early morning on July 20, right on the target area. With heavy smoke and thermal building over the target, we again were forced to fly through the mess. The ride in the thermal was very rough with my head getting bumped on my blister several times and the floor boards in the rear being thrown around our compartment. Returning across the island, we hit the coastline just north of Hamamatsu. We'd been over Japan for 1:15 hours before getting back over the ocean to turn for Tinian. We landed back on Tinian after 14:50 hours in the air and we were one happy bunch. Haberman, Lehwalder, Thomas, Schroen, Briner and I had officially finished 35 combat missions on July 20, 1945, and we knew we'd be going home shortly. There wasn't one of us who didn't give #076 a big kiss for getting us back! My official total combat hours were 518:25 hours

At debriefing, the other crews and interrogators congratulated us on our completion and wished us well. As we walked back to our tent, our talk turned to getting off Tinian and heading for the States. No one seemed to know how long our processing would take to get our orders to leave the island. Late that afternoon, Ross, Dixie, and I went swimming after a nap, getting back in time for dinner. It wasn't hard to fall asleep that night, as we'd been keyed up since taking off on that last mission to Fukui.

The morning of July 21, we enlisted men realized we had nothing to be responsible for.

We had no plane to check out and no reason to expect a call for briefing. We were just in "limbo". After a swim and lunch, most of us wrote letters,feeling a bit of a letdown. In my letter home to Mom and Dad, I wrote,

> "Yesterday, we pulled another mission and in my life Friday, July 20, 1945, was a red letter day, because I finished my required number of missions. That means I'm finished with combat flying, no more shooting, no more getting shot at. It's hard to explain how much of a relief it is not to have to worry about how much flak the enemy can throw up at you on the next target or how many fighters will be in the air. Our completing our missions was due to many things; there was good crew teamwork, good pilotage, good navigation, good gunnery, good ground maintenance, and above all devine grace."

On the 23rd, apparently the orderly room realized our crew was without any duty, because we were called to become painters, of all things. The new quonset huts had reached the stage in construction that painting was required. We fit the requirement, they thought. With our brushes in hand and a gallon of black paint, we started slapping it on the structure. At the end of the day, we had as much paint on us as on the building. After dinner, Curran and I went to the mess hall to write letters, then back to our tent for sleep.

July 26 started as another dull day. After our morning swim, we ambled back for lunch. As we were leaving the mess hall, F/Sgt. Bob Marker caught me, asking that I report to see Lt.Col. Rosebush, our squadron commander, at 1600.

I reported to Lt.Col. Rosebush as requested at 1600. He was most cordial and congratulated me on the completion of my missions. He then handed me three letters of commendation; one from Brigadier General Roger Ramey, Commander of the XX Bomber Command, dated July 22; one from Col. Alfred F. Kalberer, Commander of the 462 Bomb Group, dated July 24; and one from him, dated that day, July 26. Briefly, he reviewed my time with the squadron and the initial period in the CBI, and asked about my background and education. In my mind, I wondered what he was leading up to. He finally said he had an offer for me to consider which would require an immediate answer. He said Capt. Jim Gillespie, who headed up our armament and gunnery section, had been rotated back to the States, leaving a vacancy. He explained he wanted me to go to Australia for three weeks' rest leave. I would receive a commission to 2nd lieutenant on arrival there, and during the next two weeks, I would be promoted to 1st lieutenant. He said, possibly, I would receive another

promotion to captain on my return to Tinian, but definitely within a month, since the TO called for that rank. He said he would like to have me in that position, but it would be contingent upon my agreeing to remain with the squadron for about another year. I asked some questions, probably stupid ones, as I was rather shocked by the offer. He explained it was imperative that I give him an immediate decision, since my orders to return to the States in a few days were in the process of being cut. After a few moments, I told him my plans were to go back to the States to be married during my furlough and then to apply for OCS for a commission. I told him at some future date I would like to rejoin the outfit after that, if possible, but right then I should go home to be married. Col. Rosebush said he couldn't argue with my decision and he was sorry I didn't feel I could accept his offer. He thanked me for coming in to consider the offer and for my service in the squadron. He was very gracious. (I often wondered in retrospect what would have happened if I had accepted his offer, since, as it turned out, the Japanese surrender would have come while I was in Australia.)

Our orders were received on July 28 to report with all our gear to the orderly room on Monday, July 30, 1945, to leave the island by plane at 1100 hours. Actually, I didn't have much packing to do, as I had been ready to leave for several days. On the 29th, Schroen, Briner, and I told our friends "so long" and regretted that Curran lacked a couple of missions before he could leave. We talked with Haberman, Lehwalder and Thomas, and their orders were the same as ours. I went by to see Major Fawcett, who gave me some strike photos taken while we were in India, the most important ones being some taken over Singapore. He also stamped the pictures as cleared for me to take with me.

At 1100 on the 30th, we were ready and a truck took the six of us down to the field where one of our B-29s on an engineering hop was set to fly us to Guam. "Bake" and Curran came down to see us off. After we'd boarded, there was a beating on the rear door. It was M/Sgt. Bartunik of quartermaster, demanding that Schroen, Briner, and I turn in our .45 pistols. Reluctantly, we handed them over and the plane left for Guam.

At Guam, we were ushered to an enlisted men's barracks, while the officers went to a BOQ. We were told to be at the ATC quonset hut at 1000 hours on July 31. At 1000 the next day, a C-54 was there waiting for us to board. We were told our final destination would be Hamilton Field in San Francisco, after a stop in Hawaii to clear customs and refuel. As soon as everyone was aboard, we took off. In the compartment with us was a load of equipment and other cargo being returned to the States. The only seats were metal bucket seats, so we spent most of the time sitting on our B-4 bags which were softer. There were also cargo pads

which we stetched out on the floor to nap on. Our first hop was to Kwajalein, an atoll in the Ratak chain, where we refueled and had a chance to stretch. There certainly was nothing there. During the night, we crossed the International Date Line and landed on Johnston Island, which was no more than a speck in the vast Pacific. Watching from the side window, I heard the gear come down, but all I could see was water, yet we kept getting lower and lower. It seemed our gear was no higher than four feet above the water when land appeared under us. We rolled the entire length of the runway, then made a left turn onto the taxi strip. There was a small building where we stopped to refuel. Getting out, I saw nothing but a landing strip and a taxi strip with a building between them. A barge of fuel was anchored in the water just off the taxi strip. After takeoff, we were told we'd land at Hickam Field in Honolulu after sunrise. Landing in Hawaii, we were told we'd be there for a couple of hours while we cleared customs and refueled. We were told to stay in the terminal and we'd be called to the ATC departure zone.

After hanging around for some time, we were called and told to unload our gear, as a brigadier general and his staff were taking over our plane, and we'd be sent to a camp to await later transportation. There was no way for us to appeal, but we sure did "bitch", since we'd planned on being in the States in about fourteen hours. A bus took us to an incoming reception center and a barracks was assigned to us on August 1.

That afternoon, we indulged in fresh fruit and glasses of ice cold milk. Hitting my stomach with that cold milk caused my stomach to rebel. Already having a nervous stomach, that cold milk was just too much! I had to dash to the nearest "john" to throw up that milk. After a night's sleep, I got hit with guard duty on August 2, guarding Italian prisoners-of-war. What a laugh! Those Italians never had it so good! They wouldn't have tried to escape if the opportunity was presented to them with free passage. That afternoon I was given a physical examination and told I weighed only 135 pounds and had a "nervous" stomach which would settle down shortly. Again, on August 3, I got hit with guard duty for a stretch. Another day was shot, so I went to the PX just for something to do. At the PX, I ran into Jack Miller from Johnson City. Jack was on rest leave from flying P-51s off Iwo Jima. We had a good time talking, and I gave him the silver rupee I had carried on all my missions, asking him to bring it back to me. (Jack brought the rupee back to me in Johnson City later after the war.)

On August 4, Custom Inspectors came around and went through my luggage, confiscating my mission diaries and my strike photos. I asked for a receipt, which made the lieutenant get a little nasty. He did say the material would be returned to me. I doubted him.

(As a footnote, my diaries were returned to me in September, but not the photos.)

The afternoon of the 4th, I was told I would be shipped out by sea on the next day, August 5. I was also told I would be carrying the records of Garland W. Pascall of Memphis, Tennessee, and of Rully H. Jordan of Harrison, Arkansas, since I was the ranking man from those being shipped from our section there. On August 5, the three of us boarded a Liberty Ship, the S.S. Cushman K. Davis, together with at least 700 other men from various groups. We were assigned a space in the hole of the ship, and I selected a fold-down bunk near the top of the compartment so no one would be above me, although I had to climb over three other bunks to get to mine. I felt the engines power up and the ship move out, but I was not on deck at the time.

Once at sea, the captain came on the loudspeaker to announce we would land in Seattle, Washington, on August 14. He explained that due to wartime conditions, we would be sailing a zig-zag route as a deterent from possble submarines along our course and due to the ship being alone without an escort.

Due to the hole of the ship being so hot and crowded, all of us spent as much time as possible on deck where the breeze was reasonably cool. Practically everyone aboard was an overseas combat veteran. We even had some marines who had not been back to the States since 1942 when they fought in the island hopping invasions. One of the fellows I spent some time with was Warren Faust from Pennsylvania. He had enlisted when he was a medical student at Penn State, and he planned on returning after the war. He had been a medic in many actions while overseas. On August 6, with the usual preface, "Now, hear this!", the loudspeaker told us a new type of bomb, and atomic bomb, had been dropped by a B-29, destroying the entire city of Hiroshima, Japan. Of course, that event promoted a lot of discussion, as we heard the Japanese had been offered unconditional surrender, but they had rejected it. Again, on August 9, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and again the Japanese rejected the offer of unconditional surrender.

In the meantime, we aboard the Cushman K. Davis ate in shifts at standup tables and slept in hot bunks in the hole, while staying on deck during the days to enjoy the breeze and watch the porpoises and flying fish along side. Even when we passed in and out of rain squalls, we didn't mind getting wet. Daily, we got reports of the peace negotiations going on, plus reports on the tremendous troop buildup on Okinawa for what was expected to be an extremely high-casualty invasion of the main Japanese homeland. Also, some days on deck,

we watched the ship's gun crews practice firing on balloons sent aloft as targets. Bets were being laid down on whether different balloons would be hit on the first, second, or third shot. After watching for awhile, we wondered it they could hit anything at all. As we came close to the entrance to Puget Sound, our ship entered thick fog and the temperature dropped drastically, turning quite cool. Our ship's speed, which was slow anyway, dropped to a crawl.

Going to sleep the night of August 13, at least the weather cooled off our area in the hole. At about 0400, the morning of August 14, 1945, the loudspeaker came on with, "Now hear this! The Emperor of Japan has accepted the allies' unconditional surrender terms!" Most people would have expected an outcry of happiness and expressions of relief, but in our compartment of the Cushman K. Davis, the cry went up, "Cut that damn thing off!", "Shut up!", "Let us sleep!" and the like. Those men who had fought and were returning home cared less about the surrender at that time. They just wanted to sleep and get home.

IN THE STATES & THE JAPANESE SURRENDER
August 14, 1945

After breakfast, we watched as the ship glided to the pier in Seattle. At about 0930, on Tuesday, August 14, 1945, disembarkation began by sections. Our section was close to the top of the list, so we got in open trucks to take us to the reception center at Fort Lawton on the edge of the city. After sitting for what seemed an hour until the convoy was ready to move, our trucks moved through downtown Seattle. We were surprised at the number of people lining our route, waving flags, shouting, and throwing bottles of whiskey to us in the trucks. It was a spontaneous celebration no one expected! We were certainly pleased by that unexpected display, honoring those of us returning.

When we got to the reception center at Fort Lawton, known as the "CPBC Personnel Center", whatever that was, we were assigned barracks for processing, and I turned in the personnel files of the three of us I had been entrusted with. Since we were told the entire day would be taken up with getting settled, the phones would not be available until the next morning. I gave the soldier, who escorted our group to our barracks, ten dollars and wrote out two telegrams, one to Barbara and one to Mom and Dad, to be sent nightletter. When I woke up on August 15, I found out that date had been officially designated as "V-J Day", since it was the 15th in Japan when the emperor had notified the Japanese people of the surrender.

At Fort Lawton, the processing took longer than anticipated,since some men were being

sent to separation centers, some were being sent to new stations, and others were being sent to different centers near their homes for furloughs. When I left Tinian, the war was still going on, so my orders had read for me to have a 30-day furlough and return to a placement center to be reassigned to a B-29 unit. With separation centers being set up for discharge, I was due a change of orders.

On August 15, I was able to get a phone and talked with both Barbara and my Folks. Barbara's mother answered my call and literally yelled for Barbara to answer the phone. When Barbara picked up the phone, she didn't ask how I was or what I looked like, she just asked, "Can we announce it in Sunday's paper?" She said we could be married on Friday, September 7, and I said I was sure I could be there by that time. Since our calls were limited to three minutes, I had to hang up, but I turned around and called Mom and Dad. In talking with them, I had to tell them I didn't know where I was going from Fort Lawton, but wherever I was sent from Fort Lawton, I would get my furlough from the next stop. I did tell them Barbara and I expected to be married on September 7 in Chattanooga. It was a thrill to be able to hear Barbara's and the Folks' voices again. I also called Polly Lehwalder there in Seattle and found Lee was back but not at home at that time. Apparently, he and Tommy had a much faster ship from Hawaii than I did.

After waiting for the processing to be done, I was finally notified I was to be in charge of three troop-carrying train cars being sent to Camp Chaffee at Ft. Smith, Arkansas. Our cars would be a part of a 60-car train heading east. I was given the records of 256 men to be presented to the processors at the reception center at Camp Chaffee. Cars on the train would be shunted off to be hooked up with other trains at stops along our route, but my three cars were the only ones going to Chaffee. It was stressed that it was my responsibility that all my men arrive at Chaffee. From the start, I envisioned problems as all of my men had just arrived in the States and were tasting a certain feeling of release at that time.

On August 18, I was given the records of the 256 men and I checked each of them onto the train assigned to the Camp Chaffee group. Each troop-carrying car had bunks built in sets of three between the floor and ceiling on each side of the center aisle with 15 rows, making 90 bunks in each car. To give room for luggage in each car, I put 85 men in each car, leaving one space for the train conductor in my car. We immediately knew it was going to be a hot trip since there was nothing to move air through the cars, not even a fan. Pulling out of Seattle, we climbed shortly through the Cascade Mountains, keeping the cars comfortable with all the windows open, but the soot and smoke from the coal fired engine kept blowing into the cars,

making cleanliness impossible. Going through tunnels was almost suffocating to all of us. Even though all cars had toilets and two basins, there were no facilities for bathing. On the 19th, we passed through Boise, Idaho, stopping to take on water and coal shortly thereafter. After only a little over a day, it was obvious the men were getting bored looking at the scenery, and it was getting very uncomfortable from the heat. Twice, we had been sidetracked while an express train dashed by, including a stop for over an hour outside of Pocatello on a siding. I asked the conductor where we would be stopping for water, and he told me at a little town of Preston, Idaho, just before we were to get into Utah. I asked him if there was beer for sale there, and he replied affirmatively, so I asked about a hardware store and an ice house, finding there were both. With that information, I organized a crew from each of our three cars. Part of each crew went to buy beer and cokes, part to get ice, and another to buy two large galvanized wash tubs for each car. After most of the men pitched in money for our purchases. After about a twenty minute stop at Preston, the crews gathered all the items, so we had cold drinks in each car. We even had enough money left over to replenish our drinks and ice for another stop later. The men, and even the conductor, enjoyed themselves after that. On the 20th, we shunted back and forth in the marshalling yards at Salt Lake City, taking on some new cars while losing others, which the conductor said probably were heading for Arizona. After spending quite a bit of time in all the switching, we left to climb through the Rockies, getting into Denver in the early morning hours of the 21st. Having the opportunity, I phoned Niel Tasher, waking him from a sound sleep. We talked for a few minutes before I had to jump back on the train. Leaving Denver, we ran the long stretch across Kansas, passing our old base at Victoria, pulling into Kansas City in the afternoon of the 22nd.

The conductor told me there would be a delay for switching in Kansas City and we wouldn't be leaving there until 2300 that night. I knew the men wanted to go into the city which was just a stone's throw from the yards. I talked with all three cars of men, telling them we had time for dinner in the city, but they must be back on board prior to our leaving at 2300 hours. I cautioned them that I didn't intend to look for them and I would have to report them AWOL if they failed to show up for our trip to Camp Chaffee. With that caution, I turned them loose. Rully Jordan, who was with me from Hawaii, stayed with me and we just walked around and had dinner, although we felt dirty from the train trip. About 2200, Rully and I headed back to find where our train car would be located. On the way back, we steered a rather drunk soldier back and about 2215, we ran into two men passed out on the viaduct over to the switching yards. Finding our car, we put all three men in their bunks with help from others. At 2300 hours, we pulled out of Kansas City, and by my count I lost only two men from my cars. I was thankful it wasn't more.

Shortly after noon on August 23, we pulled into Ft. Smith, Arkansas, where we were loaded on buses for the trip to Camp Chaffee outside of town. My first duty was to deliver the records of the men entrusted to me to the lieutenant at the reception center. I explained two men were missing and indicated their folders. Surprisingly, the lieutenant said the two men had called with the information they were unable to locate the car in Kansas City. I asured the lieutenant they would show up, as they were slated for discharge. All of us who just arrived were assigned barracks and with no duty, we all headed for the PX, where I bought a bottle of Dreen shampoo, heading back to the showers. After all the soot, smoke, and general grime rubbed into me, the water discharge going down the drain was absolutely black. All of us scrubbed until the drain water turned clear. I wrapped my trousers, shirt, and underclothes in a bag to be washed later.

At a group meeting the morning of the 24th, we were notified our processing would take several days, since there were other groups who had arrived ahead of us. Several men were there for discharge, but the forms hadn't arrived, so all they could do was wait. Again, I was being held in limbo due to paperwork. Although we were restricted to base, I had the opportunity to talk with Mr. and Mrs. Wenderoth, the parents of my close friend and fraternity brother, Collier Wenderoth. I found out Collier was on his way home from Italy and he expected to be discharged.

After several days of waiting, on Tuesday, August 28, I was handed my furlough papers with a voucher for travel money to Johnson City, Tennessee, by transportation of my own choosing. The furlough was for thirty days, starting immediately that day. I was told my orders of where to report after my furlough would be mailed to my home address within a week. Rushing back to my barracks, I called the train station, finding there was no connections for me to travel by train to Memphis, so I grabbed a bus in Ft. Smith for Memphis. The ride across Arkansas to Memphis seemed endless but I got there in time to call Mom and Dad, telling them I would be in Chattanooga at 3:30AM in the morning of the 29th where I'd have a delay before going on to Johnson City. Dad said they'd drive to Chattanooga to meet me there, so I climbed on the train, falling asleep almost at once after asking the conductor to be sure to wake me at Chattanooga. I just had time to freshen up before the train backed into the station. What a wonderful feeling to step off the train to see Barbara, Mom, Dad, and Barbara's parents. I kissed Barbara so hard and long that Mom reprimanded me about it! We all drove out to Jamie and Stephen Lovelace's house where Jamie had breakfast ready. Mom and Dad gave me the ring they'd kept since my 21st birthday. The ring was a copy of Dad's with the Lancaster family crest on the stone outside and inside was the engraving, "W.H.L.Jr. 4-26-45". Dad had

brought the engagement ring I'd asked him to buy, so I slipped that on Barbara's finger. I was shown a copy of the Chattanooga Times of Sunday, August 26, 1945, announcing our engagement and upcoming marriage. It was an ungodly time of morning, so Barbara and her parents left after a big breakfast. I was worn out and tried to go to sleep at Jamie's, but I felt too full and emotionally excited, keeping me awake, plus my "nervous" stomach was cutting up.

After getting up at Jamie's, Mom, Dad, and I drove back to Johnson City with me sleeping most of the way in the back seat. It seemed relaxing and unwinding made me feel washed out all of the time.

Waking up in my own soft bed and enjoying a bathroom of my own on Thursday, August 30, made an entirely different experience than I'd been used to. Everything was so quiet and I still felt punchy. Mom's cook, Emmalee, was all smiles as I went down for breakfast, and what a breakfast it was! Again, I ate too much. I drove down to the radio station which was in new facilities from what I had known previously. I met new personnel and saw those I had known before. Going to the Hamilton Bank with Dad, I got to again see Mr. Bill Tomlinson, the president, and opened a new account, since I had no money and no checks. Later, I took the 1941 Pontiac of the station's to the highway patrol office to get a new drivers' license, as mine had expired on July 1, 1943. I ran into the rationing problem civilians had endured when I had to go to the rationing office to get a stamp to buy a new pair of low top dress shoes. While I was away from the house, Emmalee got to work on my laundry. When I got back to the house, Emmalee showed me the shirt I'd worn on the train ride out of Seattle to Camp Chaffee, saying she'd tried everything and could not remove the dirt and grime from the collar.

That afternoon, I made phone calls, getting in touch with Jim Talley,Warren Gardner, Paul Kendall, and Llewellyn Boyd, Barbara's brother, all of whom agreed to serve as groomsmen in our upcoming wedding on September 7. I asked Dad to serve as Best Man. I also, called the Read House in Chattanooga to book rooms for the wedding party and guests.

For the next few days, I did very little but relax and see old friends, plus talking with Barbara daily. Also, "Dommie", as I called Barbara's mother, and my Mom had several conversations. Without a doubt, Dommie had a Herculean task to put on a big wedding in less than three weeks, and Barbara was getting very tired too.

On Sunday, September 2, I drove back to Chattanooga to be with Barbara, and possibly be of some help with any wedding arrangements. I stayed at Barbara's house, taking over

Llewellyn's room and sharing a bathroom with Barbara.

On Monday, September 3, Barbara and I went to Dr. Bob Thomas to have our blood tests done, as was required by Tennessee law at that time. That afternoon, Barbara, her father, and I went to City Hall to obtain the marriage license. Due to Barbara not being 21 yet, Polly, her father, had to sign for her, while of course I signed for myself. I always claimed I married her father, not her!

Seldom did I see Barbara during those days prior to the wedding, since she was always going to showers, luncheons, or fittings, it seemed. I dropped by McCallie School to see "Bud" Burns, my wonderful teacher and confident, who continually wrote me throughout my period of overseas duty. I also saw Spence and Bob McCallie, who had become co-headmasters, plus seeing "Mr. Mac" McIlwaine, who was always such a great friend and gave me my love for mathematics. During other times, I met with my close friends of Warren Gardner and others who were home from service, including Tom Clary and Pete Branton, who had been a prisoner of war.

With Barbara and "Dommie" running to all those parties, I had the opportunity to grab a nap in the middle of the afternoon. With the weather so hot, there was no better place for a nap than the screened in side porch off the music room. On the afternoon of September 5, I had stripped off to my underwear, and with no one at home but me, I stretched out on the couch on the porch, dropping off to sleep. Shortly, I woke with a start as the front door opened with ladies coming into the living room, including Barbara's great aunt, "Aunt Cora". Feeling trapped on the porch, I had to jimmy the window off Barbara's bedroom, climb through it, and get to my clothes through the bathroom. With a sigh of relief, I dressed and went out to meet everyone.

On September 6, the rehearsal was held in the later afternoon at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. After the rehearsal, we went to the rehersal dinner at the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club. It was a delightful occasion with taunts and toasts from all directions. Earlier in the day, I had moved to the Read House, so after the dinner, Barbara and I tried to get to bed earlier than usual, knowing the next day would be long and busy. Mom and Dad had come in that afternoon in time for the dinner. Coming into town with the Folks, were Mary Wall and her son, Bill, from Farmville, Virginia, and Mary Rives Lancaster with her son, Preston, from Farmville and Calcutta, India. Of course, Billy, my cousin who had been raised by Mom and Dad was there. Billy had turned 12 that day. It was great to see them again.

Friday, September 7, 1945, our wedding day started hot and humid and built into a real scorcher! Barbara's aunt, "Chickie" Trotter, gave the bridesmaids luncheon for the girls, while Warren Gardner gave me a stag luncheon at the Read House. It was like "old home week" with some of my best friends there. Jim Talley, Paul Kendall, Pete Branton, and Tom Clary were all there with Warren. Llewellyn, Barbara's brother, was unable to attend, since he was in school. After much fun and a lot of advice from Jim, Paul, and Pete, all of whom were already married, I had to break it up to get dressed for the wedding, which was at 5:30PM. Time was getting short.

After a frantic shaving, bathing, packing, and dressing, I was ready to go to the church. I gave my luggage to Llewellyn, who took it to my car and drove it to an undisclosed location, since I had complete distrust of my old friends and what they had in mind for us after the ceremony. I arrived at the church at 4:45PM, as directed. After being closeted for the next forty minutes, I was "allowed" to come out to get set for the short walk to the front of the church to await Barbara. Promptly at 5:30PM, the little girls, Barbara Newell and Ansley Parker, ambled down the aisle scattering (or throwing) flower petals, followed by Alice "Putt" Kain, the maid of honor and Barbara's roommate at Gulf Park College. The music rose to a crescendo of the Wedding March, bringing the hair up on the back of my neck, as Barbara started down the aisle on the arm of her father. Lord, she was a beautiful sight! Being given to me by her father, we knelt and rose to recieve the final vows from Dr. Thorn Sparkman, the rector. I had a hard time concentrating on his remarks, as I could feel perspiration in rivulets running down my nose, down my back, down my arms, down my chest, and down my legs. More fascinating, was watching the perspiration drip off Dr. Sparkman's nose. After the "I do's", and the placing of the ring on Barbara's finger, Dr. Sparkman announced we were man and wife. I planted a solid kiss on her and we walked to the rear of the church. I was soaking wet! (The wedding pictures showed I was wet from head to toe.) Barbara was equally wet but beautiful!

We were driven to the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club for the reception where the wedding pictures were taken and we greeted the guests. I thought that line would never end, as I was ready to get back to her house to change clothes and start driving.

As we finally slipped out of the reception, Llewellyn had a car waiting for us to take us back to the house to change clothes. On driving out of the circle in front of the club, John Kain had closed the only exit with his car, so Llewellyn had to stop. John Kain was laughing and saying we couldn't leave. I was in no mood to put up with his foolishness and I told him so. He persisted and I lost my temper, telling him I was going to break his neck and run his car into the

river. He realized I meant it and moved his car in a hurry.

Getting back to Barbara's house, I realized I had left the keys to my car in the uniform I had on at lunch. Llewellyn had to make a fast trip to the Read House to find my keys in Dad's room in the pockets of my soiled uniform. Around Barbara's house, a crowd of our friends were gathered, hell bent on preventing our leaving. My car was secreted at the home of Bill Keese, my father-in-law's partner, but we had to get there. In trying to figure a way to escape the crowd, Bill Greever, the next door neighbor, rapped on the back window, saying he would take us to my car. Barbara and I crawled out a back window, snaking our way unnoticed over to the Greevers. Bill Greever had us lie on the floor of his back seat and he covered us with a blanket. As he backed down his driveway, someone yelled, they said it was only Mr. Greever, so we got to my car undiscovered. We got on route 11, and going out McCallie Avenue, we passed Gene Connell on her way home from the reception, and we waved.

On the way to Johnson City, on the north side of Knoxville, I almost missed the turn towards Johnson City, as the road had been changed since I had last driven the route. We arrived in Johnson City after midnight at my Folks' home, completely worn out. Since we were the only ones in the house, we finally dropped off to sleep like we were drugged.

The next morning, Saturday, September 8, Emmalee knocked gently on our bedroom door at about 9:00AM, saying she heard us stirring from the kitchen below, and she was fixing our breakfast. After breakfast, we phoned Barbara's parents and then called my Folks at the Read House. After packing selectively, we drove to Linville, North Carolina, where I had rented a cabin for a week to have our honeymoon.

In Linville, we went by the Carolina Inn to pick up the keys for our cabin and to arrange for our meals to be taken there. The cabin was in a secluded area, surrounded thickly by rhododendron and laurel bushes, keeping the interior quite cool. The interior furnishings were austere but comfortable and in good taste. Hot water came from a "monkey stove" through which the water pipes ran to be heated by a fire in the stove, so the first thing I did was to get that fire going for our hot water. The spring water coming into the cabin out of the tap was quite cold, so it took a while to generate the heat for the water, but it worked well. We had no telephone, but fortunately I had brought a portable radio with us for music and news.

On Sunday morning, my first job was to get the fire going to give us hot water. We then walked to the Carolina Inn for breakfast. At breakfast, the other guests must have known we

were newlyweds, or we were just sensitive, because the people kept smiling at us and watching us. About half way through breakfast, the lady from the main desk at the inn came into the dinning room, asking for "Mrs. Lancaster". No one moved, so she asked again. Finally, I told Barbara the lady was asking for her. That shook Barbara, as she was not used to being "Mrs. Lancaster". Everyone laughed as she left to answer the phone call from "Dommie".

Monday and Tuesday were clear, comfortable days and we walked the trails around Linville. Practically all the little shops around the area were closed, since the tourist season had ended on Labor Day, September 3. The general store at the crossroads remained open, so we bought some snacks to keep at the cabin. On Wednesday, the weather turned nasty, raining and turning downright cold. To heat the cabin, I built a fire in the fireplace in the living room with logs from a shed outside. I tried to build the fire in the "monkey stove" but everything had gotten so damp, the kindling wouldn't burn. To overcome the dampness, I threw a splash of kerosene into the stove and lit it. The problem that erupted was the blazing kerosene ran through and out onto the floor surrounding the stove. I quickly grabbed a wet towel and beat the fire out around the stove before any damage was done, but it certainly alarmed both of us. After that, I soaked the kindling in kerosene, then put it in the stove to light. Thursday was cloudy and cold, but we got to look around. On Friday, it was clear and cool, so we rode the Blue Ridge Parkway before coming back for dinner. On the nights of Wednesday through Friday, quilts felt good while sleeping. Satuday morning, September 15, we packed up, paid our charges at the Carolina Inn, and drove back to Johnson City. It got warmer as we lost altitude and left the higher mountains behind us. We agreed it had been a wonderful week, getting away from everything.

Getting back to Johnson City, I found my orders had arrived in the mail. When I left Tinian, I expected to be reassigned to a B-29 outfit somewhere after my furlough, but the Japanese surrender changed all that, resulting in a delay of my orders being ready at Camp Chaffee, as I previously noted. My new orders called for me to report to the Personnel Center at Lackland Air Base in San Antonio, Texas, by Thursday, September 27, 1945. A voucher for rail transportation was enclosed. Checking with Mrs. Jones at the train station, I found I would leave JohnsonCity on the 6:40PM train on September 25 in order to arrive in San Antonio in time to check in by 6:00PM on September 27.

During the next few days, I got my uniforms in shape and saw friends, while Barbara attended luncheons and teas. I also had details to be attended to concerning my change of

status from single to married. Both of us needed a rest again. I did get a dove hunt in with Dad before leaving. It was decided Barbara would stay in Johnson City a couple of days after I pulled out before going back to Chattanooga. Just before it was time for me to leave, my mission diaries arrived in the mail, cleared by the censor, but the strike photos were not sent. I was happy to see the diaries, as they were the most important to me.

Boarding the train on the 25th, I paid for a Pullman, since I decided I wasn't going to sit up all the way to Texas. I was lucky there was one upper berth available, which didn't bother me at all. After dinner, I read awhile and crawled into my upper berth, going to sleep almost immediately. We rolled into New Orleans the afternoon of the 26th and I had to change trains. My train out of New Orleans didn't leave until 9:00PM but I was able to get a small compartment alone, so I went to sleep fairly quickly. Reaching Houston, Texas, we had a layover of about a couple of hours, being switched, before pulling out for San Antonio. The train finally pulled into San Antonio at about 3:00PM the afternoon of September 27. Catching a bus out to Lackland Air Base, I reported with my orders at 4:30PM. I was assigned a bunk on the first floor of a large barracks, having about a hundred men on each floor. I found on arrival I was scheduled for separation from the service and everyone in our area was also there to be discharged. After sitting around until September 30 with no orders or directives being issued, all of us were getting restless, as we'd seen every movie on the base. At the movie one of the nights, we were sitting waiting for the lights to go out and the movie to start, when an announcement was made that there would be a slight delay to make a repair on the projector. After a few minutes, things got a bit rowdy and laughter broke out when someone blew up a condom and bounced it from one set of hands to another all over the auditorium. That brought the dimming of the lights quickly.

On October 1, a fellow from west Tennessee and I went to the reception center to talk with the sergeant major there. He told us they had no separation organization set up on the base yet, due to no forms having been received, and they could do nothing until they got the forms and instructions. He said the colonel was going crazy with more men arriving daily, expecting to be discharged. After this revelation, I began to think about how to get out of there. That morning, there was a picture of men being discharged at Greensboro, North Carolina, in the local paper I was reading. With an idea, I drew a 250-mile circle around Greensboro on a road map to see what would be encompassed. Of course, East Tennessee was within the circle. I went to the PX and bought five legal sized tablets which I brought back to the barracks. I found four other men whose homes were within that circle I drew. We five spent the next three days surveying the barracks around ours, taking down the other men's names, rank,

serial number, and hometowns within the circle. We came up with 202 men in East Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, and part of Virginia. On the morning of October 5, I approached the sergeant major, showing him the list I had compiled, and asking to see the colonel. After a short wait, I was ushered into the colonel's office. I explained that I had the list of these men and I had read about discharges being made at Greensboro, so it might be a chance he could get rid of the men on the list by sending them to Greensboro. He looked at the list and asked what barracks we'd surveyed. After a short pause, he called the center at Greensboro to see if they had room for about 300 men for separation and he received an affirmative answer. The colonel thanked me and early that afternoon a list of 293 men was posted to be shipped out by rail at 5:00PM that afternnon. Apparently, the additional men had been found in barracks we hadn't surveyed. Pulling out on a Pullman train that afternoon of October 5, we spent three days on the train, arriving in Greensboro on October 8.

After being assigned barracks and spending the night, we were told it would take time to process our records and update our pay sheets and records. Also, several groups had arrived ahead of us, and they would be processed first. On the morning of the 10th, we were told our discharges would take place on October 12, and we could have passes to go into town if we wished on October 10 and 11. The passes were good until midnight October 11.

Getting my pass, I immediately got the shuttle bus into Greensboro and went to the bus station. I caught a Trailsway bus out of there at about 10:00AM, which put me into Johnson City about 6:15PM. Getting a cab, I startled Mom and Dad by walking in for dinner at 6:30PM without having let them know I was coming. After a good night's sleep, I rode with Dad to the station the next morning and picked up the 1941 Pontiac coupe. Gassing up, I left for Greensboro, getting back to camp by midafternoon, ready for separation the next morning.

Shortly after breakfast on Friday, October 12, 1945, Columbus Day, our group was lined up alphabetically to proceed to the separation tables. The officers behind the tables started our group down the line. I was given my Honorable Discharge first, then the paymaster gave me my back pay, plus $200.00 separation pay. Next, I signed that I wanted to retain my National Service Life Insurance, changing the beneficiary to Barbara B. Lancaster. Following that, I was handed the emblem of a discharged veteran, the "ruptured duck", together with campaign ribbons, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Victory Medal. At the last table, a major pointed to a line on a paper, saying "Sign here!" I glanced at the top of the paper he wanted me to sign and saw it was an application for "Reserve Status". I just pushed the paper back without my signature and the major raised hell. I politely told him I had no intention of joining the reserves.

By that time, the line had come to a halt and men who had signed without reading what they signed came back to see what the ruckus was about. It then "hit the fan" when those men realized what they had signed came back demanding that the appalication be destroyed. Since I was finished, I walked away from all the discussion and uproar, getting in my packed car, leaving the camp as a civilian!

As I pulled out, it was just before 11:00AM, so I set my route into Viriginia, pulling into Lexington, Virginia, at about 2:00PM. I drove directly to Washington & Lee University to the office of Mr. Earl Stansbury Mattingly, the registrar of the university. "Mr. Matt" knew me , having been the advisor to my fraternity, Phi Delta Theta. He seemed delighted to see me, and we dicussed my returning to school with Barbara in January, 1946. He explained that my scholarship was still there waiting for me, but I told him to give it to someone who needed it, as I could go to school under the "G.I. Bill", being a veteran. After signing up for the next semester, I got in the car and drove to Johnson City, getting there about 9:00PM.

It had been a long day that Friday, October 12, 1945, starting the day as a technical sergeant, becoming a civilian, and becoming an upcoming student, all in one day. It was then I started the rest of my life!

-----W.H.L.,Jr., October 12, 1997

APPENDIX

B-29s AS CFC GUNNER (4/29/44 - 7/20/45)
By W. HANES LANCASTER, JR.

	B-29 NUMBER		MODEL#	FACTORY	NBR. MISSIONS
(1)	#248	(42-6248)	Model 1	Wichita	5
(2)	#393	(42-63393)	Model 10	Marietta	2
(3)	#312	(42-6312)	Model 10	Wichita	1
(4)	#506	(42-63506)	Model 25	Marietta	1
(5)	#266	(42-6266)	Model 10	Wichita	1
(6)	#346	(42-6346)	Model 10	Wichita	1
(7)	#873	(42-93873)	Model A5	Renton	1
(8)	#838	(42-93383)	Model A1	Renton	1
(9)	#457	(42-63457)	Model 20	Wichita	11
(10)	#480	(42-63480)	Model 20	Wichita	1
(11)	#569	(42-63569)	Model 30	Marietta	9
(12)	#459	(42-63459)	Model 20	Marietta	1
(13)	#076	(42-94076)	Model 30	Renton	1
					36

FOOTNOTES

(1) Page 1, John Coaster: In the 1950's, I sat next to Buddy Martin, Director of the Tennessee Aeronautical Commission, in a meeting. Buddy had been an old barnstormer pilot, who had flown into our field in Chattanooga often and knew John Coaster. He had just attended an International meeting in Frankfort, Germany, and met with John Coaster who lived in a bungalow outside of the city. John asked about our family and told Buddy he had been sent to the States following World War I for the purpose of spying on our aircraft industry. He went back to Germany in the mid-1930's and became a general in the Germany Luftwaffe during World War II.

(2) Page 94., Capt. Chuck Preston: After returning to Piardoba from Madras, On Wednesday, January 31, Lt. Col. Rosebush, our squadron commander, called for me and I went to his office. He said he had a letter from a Capt. Preston at the rest camp regarding my behavior while I was there and making certain demands. Rosebush wanted to know what happened to prompt Preston's letter. I told him the entire story, leaving out no detail. After hearing the details, he broke into a laugh, said he didn't blame me, and tore up Preston's letter.

(3) Page 140., Home before marriage: While I was in Johnson City prior to going back to Chattanooga and our wedding, Mom mentioned she had a letter from Maureen Turner, saying she was in Santa Monica, California, and wanted to drive across the country to see Mom. Mom told me she sent Maureen the clipping from the Chattanooga paper telling of our upcoming wedding. I asked her for the letter from Maureen, so I could write her, but Mom said she threw the letter away. As could be expected, I never heard from Maureen again!

W. HANES LANCASTER, JR.
B-29 MISSIONS AS CFC GUNNER (4/9/44-7/20/45) BY PLANE

B-29 NUMBER	MODEL	FACTORY	NAME	MISSIONS
(1) #248 (42-6248) (Crew's plane)	Model 1	Wichita	"Green Dragon"	Walker AAF-Piardoba Bangkok, Yawata(abort), Palembang, Anshan, & 6 Hump trips. (Wrecked 10/10/44)
(2) #393 (42-63393) (Crew's temp.)	Model 10	Marietta	"Rush Order"	2 Okayama,Formosa & 4 Hump trips. (Lt.Col.Gregg took over)
(3) #312 (42-6312) (Crew's assign.)	Model 10	Wichita	?	Omura (abort), Photo recon Sasebo-Omura, Nagaski, Omura, & Kure aborted. 2 Hump trips.
(4) #506 (42-63506) (Crew's assign.)	Model 25	Marietta	?	Singapore
(5) #266 (42-6266) (Crew's assign.)	Model 10	Wichita	?	Round trip Hump
(6) #346 (42-6346) (Crew's assign.)	Model 10	Wichita	"Man O'War"	Mukden
(7) #873 (42-93873) (Crew's assgn.)	Model A5	Renton	?	Initially assigned as spare, on #459, but all planes got off so reassigned photo recon to Singapore.
(8) #838 (42-93383) (Crew's assign.)	Model A1	Renton	?	Rangoon
(9) #457 (42-26457) (Crew's Plane)	Model 20	Wichita	"Old Acquaintance" (Retired at suggestion of Gen.LeMay)	Singapore, Rangoon, Move from CBI to Tinian, Oshima, Nagoya, 2 Tokyo, Abort on Yokohamo, Kobe, Osaka.
(10) #459 (42-63459) (Crew's assign.)	Model 20	Marietta	Dumbo	#457 could not be repaired from Tokyo on 5/24 to fly Tokyo on 5/26, so assigned this Dumbo on 5/27 for search & rescue.
(11) #480 (42-63480) (Lancaster's volunteer)	Model 20	Marietta	"Dream Girl"	On 5/17/45,Kelly of Till's crew got sick at briefing & Lancaster took his place to Nagoya.

(12)	#569 (42-63569) (Crew's Plane)	Model 30	Marietta	No time to name!	Amagaski, Omuta, Kure, Osaka, Okayama, Kure, Takamatsu, Chiba, Sendai, & Numazu. Destroyed by new crew being checked out, killed all 16 men aboard!
(13)	#076 (42-94076) (Crew borrowed)	Model 30	Renton	Unnamed	Fukui (Crew's last mission after losing #569 when new crew destroyed it on a check-out!)

OCTOBER 20, 1944 --- SEE OTHER SIDE