

WWII Memories

B. Vic Dison, Jr.
40th Bomb Group
25th Bomb Squadron



25th Bomb Squadron Insignia

ORIGINATION OF A/C BOB DERRINGTON'S CREW



After some 50 years the recollection of events become a little hazy. Our crew, of course, started when Lt. Bob Derrington arrived at Clovis, New Mexico. Bob had been a pilot at a Bombardier/Navigator School prior to being assigned to B-29 Combat Crew. In civilian life I believe Bob worked for one of the aircraft engine manufacturing companies and was, originally, from Michigan.

As I recall Bob's first selection was Cpl. Dave Webster, a graduate of Mechanic's school. Dave became the Right Gunner. Dave was from Louisville, Kentucky and had worked for a relative who was an automobile dealer.

Next was myself, Cpl. Vic Dison, Ex-Gunnery Instructor. I was from Los Angeles, California and had been a Gunnery Instructor. My assignment to the Tail Gunner position came when no one else wanted the position - so I volunteered. After we arrived overseas it was apparent that the tail gunner position was the safest place on the plane since that position had, by far, the most survivors from crashes and combat. When requested to change positions by other crewmembers I politely declined.

Not necessarily in order, next was Cpl. Marv Fears, Radio Operator. He had just reported on base. He was from Louisville, Kentucky and Dave, being an "operator" and also from Louisville, convinced Bob to request his assignment to the crew. Marv proved to be excellent as a radio operator.

When a new batch of Mechanic School graduates arrived Bob added Cpl. Frank Wotus, Left Gunner. Frank was from Crabtree, Pennsylvania and the youngest member of the crew.

Shortly after Cpl. George Fanandakis, was assigned to the crew he was selected to be the Radar Operator. George was from Boston, Massachusetts.

When Sgt. Earl Fears (Marv's brother) arrived at Clovis, Bob Derrington worked hard to get him assigned to the crew. Having brothers on the same crew was a tabu sort of thing but eventually he became our CFC Gunner. Of course Earl was also from Louisville, Kentucky. He had been a Central Fire Control System Mechanic prior to arrival at Clovis.

The last of the enlisted personnel was T/Sgt Pershing "Push" Mills, Flight Engineer. As I recall Push had been a B-17 Crew Chief in prior years and was from Caddo, Oklahoma. He was an Oklahoma farm boy.

The Officers included ex-infantry Drill Sergeant Walt Pytko as Co-Pilot. He was from Rochester, New York and had worked for a General Motors factory as an Industrial Engineer doing Time Studies on the manufacturing line in civilian life.

Henry Captein, the Bombardier, was from Oregon and had been attending College prior to entering the army.

Steve Jones, Navigator, was from Cordell, Oklahoma and was a pharmacist in civilian life.

EXPERIENCES DURING TRAINING

Our training consisted of ground school classes and long, arduous flights of 12 to 16 hours duration. A typical flight would be to Chicago then Los Angeles and back to Clovis, New Mexico. One time we flew to Big Springs, New Mexico to bring some engine parts for one of our planes, which had made an emergency landing there. Another time we had engine problems and landed at Wichita, Kansas. Here we were confined to a hotel since we did not have "Dress" clothes. After this experience we always had dress clothes with us on every flight.

The flight to Big Springs, Texas was in a B-17. We were bringing parts for one of our planes, which had made an emergency landing here. After landing we taxied to a parking space. The ground crewman who had directed us to the parking space told the pilot (Bob Derrington) to back up. Having never experienced this operation I learned that this could be accomplished by revving the right engine(s) and applying the right brake then switching to the left engine and left brake. It works.

On another mission in a B-17 with the two newest members of the crew on their first ever airplane flight another incident occurred. I had been in the cockpit for a while and headed for the rear of the plane. As I proceeded through the Bomb Bays I decided to use the "relief tube" (the

closest thing to a toilet on a B-17). This was noted by Dave Webster who was now in the Cockpit area. He advised Walt Pytko who was flying the plane. Walt put the aircraft into a series of turns, dives and climbs. Being wedged between the Bomb Racks I had no trouble. After finishing my "business" I proceeded to the rear of the plane. Just outside the radio room I had to step over the radio operators regurgitated lunch at the entrance to the gunners compartment. Here I saw our newest crewmembers ready to vacate the plane. They were sure something was wrong with the plane after Walt's maneuvering. But one crewman had pulled his ripcord and his parachute was lying the length of the gunnery compartment floor.

I don't recall much of the other aspects of training except this was a time for us to get to know each other and become a team

REPORTING FOR DUTY - CHAKULIA, INDIA

Our crew was assembled at Clovis, New Mexico. After training in Clovis we were transferred to Lincoln, Nebraska for 30 days prior to reporting to Kearney, Nebraska to pick up our aircraft. At Lincoln we were allowed to do anything we wanted as long as we reported in each morning. After 30 days of good times - wine, women and song - we proceeded to Kearney, Nebraska to pick up our plane, check it out and prepare for our flight overseas. Since it was November it was cold and dark in the early morn as we gave the plane its first check-out. Our first flight was uneventful except for testing the maximum altitude. At 34,000 feet Bob Derrington, our airplane commander, found the plane to be "mushy" and getting difficult to control. Of course this altitude was reached without a load. We never had the opportunity to check out a B-29 with a full load.

Our first stop, after leaving Kearney, was at West Palm Beach, Florida. My only recollection of events there was of a Mexican Tail-Gunner from Pasadena, California. On his last trip home he had secured two large bags of dried chili peppers (his supply until he returned home). At the NCO club there were some Navy crews flying B-24s to England. After a few drinks the Navy fliers were being challenged to partaking of the Chilis. There were several of the "Salts" that accepted the challenge. Later we learned that some of the "Salts" did not rid their systems of Chilis till after they reached England (about a week later).

Leaving the mainland we were off to Puerto Rico. After living in tents and wooden barracks for nearly 2 years we found out that there were some places where the quarters were "Deluxe". In Puerto Rico the barracks were concrete and brick as were all the buildings. The grounds were all nicely "manicured" with shrubbery and grass. If we had been quartered at bases like this being in the "service" wouldn't have been half bad.

The next stop was at Georgetown, British Guinea. As we approached the field we could see rain squalls in various spots and this is what we now know as the "Rain Forests". A beautiful place from the air but, after landing, we now found out about heat, humidity and mosquitoes. At this base we were requested to check out a local "flight crew" headed by the Base Commander.. The base had repaired a B-29 which had crashed during its flight overseas. After a day with this make-up crew and giving training for the pre-flight check, taxiing, etc. we were anxious to leave. The Base Commander was a tyrant and treated his men like slaves. The next morning we

prepared to take-off when the Base Commander instructed us to park our aircraft as we were to further train his "crew" and test-flight his re-furbished aircraft. Bob advised the Base Commander that our orders were to proceed overseas as speedily as possible and we couldn't accommodate him.

Off to Natal, Brazil. The only recollection of this flight was our landing. I was standing between the Pilot and Co-Pilot in the front cockpit. Co-Pilot Walt Pytko was flying the plane. As we approached the runway the pilot advised Walt that he was heading for the wrong run-way. Walt was not one who would abort the landing and join the traffic pattern for a second try. He proceeded to make a sharp 90 right turn - we were only had 200 feet of altitude at the time. As he came out of the turn he immediately made a left turn of about 105 degrees in order to line up with the right runway. During the turn Bob advised Walt that there were telephone poles and electric wires ahead. Walt acknowledged the communication, lifted the left wing up then completed the turn after we passed the wires. Completing a turn in a B-29 with less than 40 feet of altitude is really not very comforting.

The next morning found us headed for Gold Coast in Africa. After landing there were a lot of natives bidding for the right to "help" us get our baggage to our quarters. The native we selected, after getting us settled, offered more services - make your bed, do your laundry, etc. - of course for a fee. Finally he had "earned" 75 cents and off he went. Displaying his earnings to the other natives he headed for town. His 75 cents assured him of "the best girl in town - all night".

At this base was a beautiful white sand beach, one of the few spots that entices one to return to sometime in the future. We also watched the natives fish. The fishing nets were loaded on a rowboat with one end left on the beach. The boat proceeded into the sea in a wide semi-circle. Behind, on the beach, an adult and several young boys were holding the end of the net which included a long rope. As the boat returned to the beach the other end of the net was given to another adult and group of boys. Then each end was manually pulled in until the net and any "caught" fish were on the beach. While pulling in the net there was a lot of rhythmic singing and the "workers" seemed to be having a good time. Of course now there was food for dinner and for selling/trading.

Our next stop was at Kano City, Nigeria. This base was quite small and could only handle 5 B-29's at a time. The word here was to stay overnight and then to the next stop. My memory here includes two events. The first and most important was the best meal during my entire military service. Here in the middle of Africa we had a "king's" buffet. There was all kinds of seafood including shrimp and crabmeat, then fried chicken and beef chunks, potato and other salads plus bread and butter, coffee and other beverages - yes, a meal fit for a king. In the evening most of the flying personnel visited the NCO or Officer's Club. Later, feeling quite happy, several GIs/Officers took turns trying to ride Donkeys. Their attempts brought the rest of us a lot of laughs since their attempts ended up with the Donkies winning.

On to Khartoum, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Our arrival at this base ended up with two flat tires on the left landing gear. Bob D (Aircraft Commander) immediately stopped the aircraft thus blocking the use of the landing strip until a tractor with tow-bar could pull us to a parking

place. This created havoc with other aircraft circling the field. Some of the Pilots stated that they were about to run out of fuel and had to land right now. The Tower advised them to continue circling until the runway was cleared.

At Khartoum the restrooms were at the end of the barracks. They were class A "Outhouses" and kept clean by natives. Somehow we learned that at the other side of the airfield there was a large hangar which had been built by the US and could be reached by a 45-minute bus ride. With nothing to do I took a ride and at the hangar found good ole US style toilets with running water. So - when the need arose - off to a 45-minute bus ride with the appropriate reading materials I went. This was a luxury that, as a GI overseas, was a pleasure not to be experienced very often.

Next stop was at the Aden Protectorate (Now known as Yemin). Our flight was lengthened by the need to fly a circuitous route around Ethiopia, reason unknown. It was a short stop with a hot supper, a movie and a night's sleep then on to Karachi, India. In Karachi Bob Derrington, Airplane Commander, insisted on washing down the plane (He was not going to bring a dirty plane to his first overseas base. As Tail Gunner my assignment was the tail assembly. What a job - happy to say that this was our first and last wash job in the service. Luckily we also got the afternoon and evening off so off to the City we went. Our group included the Fears brothers, Frank Wotus, Dave Webster and myself (If I remember correctly). My memory is rather vague but I do recall that we hired a buggy with horse and driver for a tour of Karachi. This was after hiring a guide (a native youngster) which the local GI's had advised. This lad not only led you around but also protected you from problems with other youths. Our only problem was how much to pay for the "Cab". When we gave 10 rupees (about \$3.00) to the driver he looked befuddled. We were about to give him more when a GI hollered to give him 5 rupees (\$1.50) only.

Leaving Karachi we proceeded on to Chakulia, India, our new home. On the way we flew over the Taj Mahal near Agra. We didn't know the significance of this at the time but did enjoy this splendid edifice as seen from the air. Chakulia was 128 miles North of Calcutta in the middle of nowhere.

We had finally arrived at our first overseas permanent base.

MIA - A/C BOB DERRINGTON

MISSION TO RANGOON BOB DERRINGTON'S ILL-FATED 1ST MISSION

Immediately after arriving in Chakulia we learned that "schooling" was still a part of our activities. It was necessary for the airplane commander to participate in at least one "mission" before we, as a crew, could also fly "combat". Bob Derrington flew on the mission to Rangoon a couple of days after our arrival in Chakulia. This turned out to be disastrous. Our squadron, the 25th, was the "experimental" squadron for the 20th Bomber Command. Anything new would be assigned to this squadron. On the mission to Rangoon there were "mixed" bomb loads which consisted of different weighted bombs in the same bomb bays (500 lb/1000lb/2000 lb bombs).

The theory was that, due to the close drop statistics, although the bombs may collide they would not explode. This was proved wrong - the bombs did collide and did explode. Results - loss of several aircraft and some 38 personnel including Bob Derrington. We subsequently were told that one crew had perished with the aircraft and one crew had bailed out. It was reported that one pilot had radioed that they were bailing out with no word received from the other aircraft. The official word was that Bob was with the crew which had perished.

A/C BOB DERRINGTON RESCUED

A pilot with another crew, Lt. Bob Elliot, from Colorado was a good friend of Bob Derrington. Whenever I saw Bob Elliot we always talked of Bob Derrington and we both agreed that Bob was alive and would someday return. After 5 months we learned of the rescue of Prisoners of War near Rangoon, Burma. At the time we were waiting for the start of the entertainment for the evening. This night we were to be presented with the play "The Man who came to Dinner", a USO show starring Moss Hart. The show was great but was second to the news of the POW's rescue. Bob Elliot and I both agreed that we would soon hear that Bob Derrington would be one of them. The next day we were rewarded and learned that Bob was a survivor and was being evacuated to a hospital in India.

WELCOME TO CHAKULIA, INDIA ALLEN "STINKY" STEINBERG

On arrival in Chakulia our first experience was the loss of our aircraft - not by combat but due to seniority. The senior crew on board was awarded our aircraft and we were then assigned to another plane as a "second" crew. Subsequently the plane was re-named "Superstitious Aloitious" (I won't tell you the original name since it was a little obscene). Since there was no room in the enlisted flight crew barracks we were assigned to a ground crew barracks. Personnel in this barracks were remnants of a squadron which had been eliminated since 95% of the flight crews had been casualties.

Our assignment was really fortunate since there was a Jewish Ordinance Man from Brooklyn named Allen Steinberg who sort of adopted our crew. He had a nickname which really was inappropriate - "Stinky". He would obtain ration cards for beer and cigarettes from other GI's and, also using his own, buy these rations and give them to us. Another benefit was his stock of "foodstuffs". We learned from others that, on reaching India, he complained to his family about the lousy chow. His family ran a delicatessen store in Brooklyn and promptly began mailing him packages of food. It was acknowledged that, when mail arrived including 12 "packages", Stinky would be the addressee of 11 of the packages. He had at least 2 locker boxes filled with food and he would share his food stock with us at late night snacks. I've often thought about Stinky and wished that I had stayed in contact with him.

FLIGHT TO CHINA

After losing our pilot, A/C Bob Derrington, we were assigned a new pilot. Our first flight was a trip over the "Hump" to China. Our cargo was a full load of bombs (20,000 lbs.). During the flight Navigator Steve Jones provided headings to the pilot who would then tell Steve

that he didn't think that was right and would take a different heading. Finally Steve told the pilot to fly wherever he wanted and when he was ready to take the navigator's advice to call him back. In the meantime Steve would track the flight. After the ETA for arriving at Airfield B-1 at Hsinching, China had gone by, the pilot finally admitted that he was lost and requested a heading. Steve promptly provided the appropriate directions and a new ETA. At the precise moment we arrived at the airfield. On our approach to the runway we discovered that we only could get 5 degrees of flaps. Under that condition our landing speed increased to about 150 MPH.

The Pilot brought us in for a perfect landing even though the runway was of dirt/gravel and we were carrying extra gas and the full bomb load.

Immediately after landing we encountered another flight crew. They advised us that they were taking over our B-29 and that we were assigned to their plane, one that needed an engine change on the left wing as well as some maintenance on the an engine on the right side. They were to return to Chakulia, India and then back to the States for R&R. We advised them of all the problems with the aircraft including the dysfunction of the automatic IFF signal. They fixed the Flap problem and immediately took off for India.

Unfortunately, on their flight back to Chakulia, they strayed from the flight path and didn't have the automatic IFF signal to advise our allies that they were a "friendly" aircraft. It was night-time and when a British pilot encountered the plane with no IFF signal, thought that the plane had been captured by the Japanese and was being used for an attack on the allies. He promptly shot the aircraft forcing the crew to bail out. All aboard, except the navigator, landed on an island in the Salween River in Burma. The Navigator landed in the river and drowned. We later learned that, previously, the British Pilot had been shot down by an American Pilot. We used to contend, jocularly, that we had two wars going, one against the British and one against the Japanese.

We had several experiences while in China. It seemed that every night we heard the air raid warning sirens. This was the signal to leave our quarters and head for the fox-holes. We complied on the first night when the sirens went off and headed for the open fields and into the fox-holes. After the "all clear" signal we returned to our quarters. Since it was bitterly cold at night we got the charcoal burners out and prepared a fire to warm up. As we warmed up we also caught wind of a terrible odor. We soon discovered that the odor came from our shoes. The Chinese used the fox-holes for outhouses. The second night I stayed in my cot when the alert was sounded. within a couple of nights everyone stayed in their cots. Although there seemed to be an air-raid alert every night we did not get bombed while we were in China.

One of the benefits of being in China was the food. There was plenty of green fresh vegetables and fresh meat. At the flight line "transient" mess they served fresh eggs and pancakes all day. On the way to the mess hall there was always a "peanut vendor" selling peanuts even at 6:00 o'clock in the morning. We noticed that the vendor would be wearing several long robes, one on top of the other - and then would be bare-footed. He also had a little charcoal pot between his legs to keep warm.

We spent 1944 Christmas in China before returning to Chakulia. On our return to Chakulia I was confronted by the rest of the crew. They had a meeting and decided to decline to fly again with the pilot. Our experience on the China flight seemed that he always knew more than the crew members, whether it was navigation, engine performance, gunnery or whatever. As a pilot he certainly could fly as evidenced by the landing in China under adverse conditions. As an Aircraft Commander he was a flop so I agreed with the rest of the crew. Shortly thereafter we acquired a new A/C - Lt. Del Stevens. Del proved to be a top-notch Pilot, Aircraft Commander and friend.

SIGHTSEEING NEAR CHAKULIA INDIA

Of course our life in India was primarily for the purpose of bombing the Japanese. We did take excursions into the surrounding woods, an area known as "Bengal Land" where the Bengal Tigers are found. We never ran across any Tigers but did find a couple of wild elephants. Before proceeding into the Jungle we acquired all of the Tracer Bullets we could for our "45" automatic pistols. When an elephant was spotted some of our "smarter" guys decided to scare the elephant and proceeded to pepper him with the Tracers. He was some distance away and it took a few shots for them to get the range. The bullets would hit the animal and then bounce off. This activity was soon stopped when others decided that infuriating the elephant into a charge at us was really not the most healthy thing to do.

Proceeding to other experiences we soon reached a small river. Here we found local Indian women washing clothes. They were using paddles and would beat the clothes between rinses in the river water. Their "table" was a flat rock at the river's edge. We also noted that native men with crude bows and arrows were closely watching us from the outskirts of the nearby village. After a short time we continued our trek and returned to the base.

DRY-DOCK AT SINGAPORE

On one of the missions to Singapore the Dry-dock was bombed and reported "sunk". Shortly after we arrived in Chakulia a rumor had spread throughout the 20th Bomber Command that a bill had been sent to the command headquarters requesting reimbursement for the cost of the dry-dock. It was not clear as to whether the British Government had sent the bill or if it was from a private owner.

We also heard rumors that our allies were unhappy with Merrill's Marauders for the destruction of many bridges in Burma. Our military personnel in the China-Burma-India (CBI) were, primarily, there to show the Japanese that we were present in the area and also to bolster the spirits of the American population. Generally our actions were of the "Hit and Run" variety. In the meantime the military build-up began in the Pacific and, in 1945, the Pacific offensive got under way leading to the end of the war with Japan.



BANGKOK, BURMA

Shortly after Lt. Del Stevens was assigned as our Aircraft Commander we participated in a mission to Bangkok. Col. Kingsbury, Squadron Commander, was the Check Pilot for Del and our crew. As the planes assembled near the target area after climbing to a 20,000 foot altitude it was noted that the prop governor on one engine was stuck at climb RPM. The decision was to maintain formation, complete the bomb run and then feather the engine as we headed for home.

Despite the effort to conserve fuel it was necessary to make an emergency landing at the first airfield available. We landed at a British Field named Cox Bazaar in the most Southern Tip of India. It was reported that Japanese troops were within 14 miles of the field. Quartered on this base were Mosquito Bombers and Fighter planes. It was a small field and a short runway. The only place to park our B-29 was at the end of the runway. I was selected to stand guard the first night. There were many visitors during the evening from the local pilots and other personnel. They were all curious and marveled at the size and beauty of the B-29. Of course we only allowed them to inspect the outside with no one allowed inside the ship.

Needless to say the mess at this British Base was worse than our rations. The British personnel begged for any K-rations we could spare to augment their rations. There were two stories that were related here. The first story covered the pilot who had shot down the B-29 where the crew bailed out over the Salween River. He was stationed at Cox Bazaar and verified the facts related to that flight.

The second story was about a previous B-29 visit to the base. An emergency landing had been made and the plane could not stop. It over-ran the runway and ended up in the lagoon at the end of the landing strip. The crew members hurriedly left the aircraft jumping into a life raft which had been thrown out the rear door and inflated. As they tried to paddle to shore the life raft didn't move. It was sitting on the bottom since there was only about 6 inches of water. In the meantime the British were standing at the edge of the lagoon laughing their heads off.

The following morning Sgt. Push Mills was able to fix the Prop Governor, the British provided some "petrol" and we were able to return to Chakulia.

SAIGON, FRENCH INDO-CHINA

Our mission to Saigon was to destroy a large bridge. On this mission Col. Luna flew as A/C. After the Bomb Run we noted that the bridge was still standing. One of the planes had trouble and could not get the bomb bay doors to close. Col. Luna decided that our aircraft would escort the troubled plane. As we were flying through scattered clouds I spotted a formation of Japanese Fighters through a hole in the clouds. They were about 100 feet lower than we were and headed about 120 degrees off our course. Apparently they didn't spot us since no further sightings were made. As we proceeded back to the base the troubled B-29 was running short of gas and we headed for Chittagong where there was a friendly base. This field was also a fighter/fighter-bomber field. They were not too happy to see us since providing gas for big bombers really shorted their supply. They did accommodate us with a truckload (about 750 gallons) and we were on our way. Take-off was an experience. After a C-47 had taken off using about half of the runway, Col. Luna decided to do the same. He taxied to the end of the runway, hit the left brake hard doing a 180 degree turn and then applied full throttle. We took off using only half the runway (probably in 2,000-2,500 feet). With the nose pointed skyward I slid a foot or two until we leveled off. Those engines really performed.

Later that day a reconnaissance plane had dropped pamphlets at Saigon and also took pictures. They reported the bridge sinking as they dropped their pamphlets. What a time they had kidding the pilots and crew that they had sunk the bridge with paper pamphlets when our formation with, maybe, some 200,000 lbs. of bombs could not do.

FROM CHAKULIA, INDIA TO TINIAN ABOARD THE USS GENERAL MACRAE

As springtime emerged we were advised that we would be leaving India. There was some re-alignment of crews and those, like myself, who were displaced were advised that we would be leaving by boat. We filled our Barracks Bag with our clothes and other belongings and prepared to leave. I had a problem - I needed a flying care-taker for my folding table. Sgt. Push Mills was still with A/C Del Stevens and he kindly consented to take charge of my table.

As we left the base we were loaded on a train for the 128 miles to Calcutta. In Calcutta we soon boarded a troop transport, the General MacRae. This was one of two ships to take non-

flying personnel to Tinian in the Pacific Ocean. This trip took about 45 days. While still in the Indian Ocean we came to a dead stop. We were advised that the other ship had problems which needed fixing. Since we were "advised" by Tokyo Rose that our ships would be torpedoed before we reached the States we became quite concerned. Of course we were delighted that our destination was home. This was soon denied and we were advised that our destination was the Mariannas - for at least 3 months then, maybe, back to the states.

On board ship I met one of the Captain's Stewards. He was a Filipino from Hollywood and we became friends. What a great break. For breakfast this steward would make me a big ham and egg sandwich every morning. At lunch and dinner we would have a nice meal since the Captain never had guests and the stewards always prepared enough food for 8. Generally the meal consisted of the main entree (Beef, Ham, Chicken or Pork Roast, sometimes a steak or Pork Chops or some other entree), vegetables, rice and potatoes, salad, soup, bread or rolls, crab cocktail and dessert. I really lived it up on board ship. Also every night the Steward would empty all the fresh fruit from the refrigerator and I would disperse these to my buddies on board. When I returned from eating dinner my buddies always met me with "What did you steal from the Captain tonight?".

All enlisted personnel received work assignments from time to time. I drew KP once and spent the evening in the Kitchen. At break time we had coffee and doughnuts. The break area was next to the ovens. When I had KP they were baking chickens for the Officers' Mess. When the cook left the area I went by the ovens and, with only other KPs in the area grabbed two chickens and quickly departed. As I got out on deck I heard the cook yelling that somebody had swiped some chickens. Shortly the cook and some Marine SPs came on deck looking for the "thief". Using a handkerchief I tied the legs together and hung them around my neck. With the SPs on my tail I grabbed a rail and hung over the side of the ship. After what seemed like ages (but was more like a few minutes) the SPs disappeared. I climbed back aboard and quickly went below to my bunk area. Needless to say, my buddies and I enjoyed our midnight snack.

On my second assignment to KP my job was on the serving line. At lunch our desert was ice cream. Of course everyone wanted plenty of dessert. Being a generous guy I gave everybody as much as they wanted as long as it fit on the tray. The Mess Sergeant noted this and gave me a tongue lashing. As soon as he left I continued my generous ways. Later the seamen who attended the ice cream "factory" came to the mess hall and told me that this was the first time they had ever used up all the ice cream available. They were happy since it allowed them to clean up their storage area.

At dinner time we had apple pie. Of course this was a big hit. Again I was generous but had to be resourceful in order not to be caught since the Mess Sergeant was keeping a close eye on me. When asked for extra pie I would tell the GI to lift up his bread and then place the bread over a piece of pie. Then a second piece of pie could be placed on the tray. Needless to say we also used up all the pie available.

We finally reached Australia and docked in Melbourne. A two day stay resulted in getting shore leave. Dave Webster, Frank Wotus, Marv Fears, Earl Fears and myself headed into town. We boarded a train at the docks and soon arrived in town. Looking for a good meal we

entered the Victoria Hotel. The Hostess advised us that we could get a meal by joining a line of people down a hall (Cafeteria Style). We asked about the tables in the main room which had linen tablecloths and napkins. She advised us that this was their banquet room and very expensive. We told her that cost was no object and this was where we wanted to eat.

As we were seated at a table we promptly lit cigarettes. When we offered the hostess a cigarette she was reluctant to accept. She took a cigarette and promptly wrapped it in a handkerchief and placed it in her pocket. When questioned about her actions she told us that she would wait until she got home and into her "Easy Chair". She could then leisurely enjoy her cigarette. Being "wealthy" Yanks we immediately pulled out a whole package and insisted she take it. She did so reluctantly.

We had a great Steak Dinner with all the trimmings including a quart of fresh milk for each of us. We then proceeded to hit the town. Earl Fears and I stayed together while the others went their way. As we were walking we stopped at a "stage door" where there were several members of a stage show. We were advised that the local pubs closed at 6:00 PM and it was now about 5:00 PM. We proceeded through an alley to the next street and found a pub. Here the drinks cost about 7 cents with "Suds" at a nickel a glass. This gave us a great chance for being "Big Spenders". We both bought a round for the house which cost us about \$3.00 each. It also made us quite popular and we had a great time - until closing. Later we inquired about "Bootleg". We were able to get a quart of Canadian Club for \$7.50 which was considered outlandish by the locals. They didn't know that it cost \$50.00 or more if you were able to find a bottle on the base.

I don't recall much more about our shore leave except that we had a good time in Melbourne. As the ship left port we headed up the eastern shore of Australia. The ship stopped at Townsville which was close to Sydney. Here we loaded some 500 Aussie soldiers who were to be taken to New Guinea. As we proceeded through the Coral Sea our Aussie friends got "seasick" - even though the sea was like glass with hardly a ripple. It was so clear that you could see the bottom of the ocean. This was one of the most beautiful places in the world and is well worth visiting again.

After the Aussies debarked at New Guinea we proceeded Northward. The ship stopped during the night and when we got up the next morning there were, it seemed, hundreds of ships - as far as the eye could see. I don't recall positively but I believe that we were near the island of Truk. Our next stop was at the Island of Tinian. Carrying our Barracks Bag and any other gear, disembarking from the General MacRae was an experience. Over the side of the ship and onto a rope ladder about 20 feet wide we descended into a landing craft. Although the seas were calm one's last step onto the landing craft could be 6 inches or several feet - a real experience.

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS - WHO LOADED MY GUNS?

Sgt. "PinBall" Quinlan was a great Story-Teller. We enjoyed his tale of returning via land escorted by Chinese Guerilla Troops after a forced landing in Manchuria and many other stories about his experiences. PinBall was a member of the "MEMPHIS BELLE", the legendary B-17 in Europe.

There is one story that PinBall would never tell.

When PinBall was returning to India from China on one flight, George Varoff, the Aircraft Commander, requested PinBall to fly Tail-Gunner since that crew member was feeling sick. PinBall assented and accomplished his pre-flight check-out including the loading of his tail-guns. Off they flew and when the gunners were requested to check their guns the tail guns would not fire. Fortunately no enemy aircraft were encountered.

After landing PinBall requested Bill Lee, Armament Ground Crew Specialist, to check the tail guns as to their failure in flight. Bill Lee promptly made an investigation and found that PinBall had placed the pins on the wrong side of the guns. The Top and Lower Turrets were loaded on the opposite side as compared to the Tail Guns. When told this PinBall grew quite distressed and promptly told Bill Lee "If you ever tell anybody about this I'll kill you".

How did I get the story? After arriving on Tinian from Chakulia, India I met Bill Lee. He was a Korean whose home was on McClintock Street in Los Angeles within a couple of miles of my home. From further discussion I learned that he went to school with a good friend of mine, a Marine Captain who was stationed on Saipan. Since we had these things in common we became friends. Of course Bill swore me to secrecy - but after all these years the issue of Secrecy is obsolete. I wouldn't want this little story to die with the passing of PinBall, Bill and myself.

SHORT-CUT MAINTENANCE

After arriving at Tinian I spent a lot of time out on the line. Having always enjoyed "mechanics" I would assist the ground crew in whatever way I could. Sometimes I'd work with the mechanics, other times with Ordnance or Armament. One questionable practice I observed was the unloading of the tail guns. This was a very difficult job requiring laying on one's stomach and pulling a tool about 8 inches to remove a live round from the chamber. An extremely tiring job. Armament personnel would get lazy and do the job by removing the back-plate of the gun and then removing the rod and return spring. As a former gunnery instructor this method was strictly a "NoNo". Just one little miscue and the trigger bar could be touched causing the gun to be fired. At best the result would mean firing a round. At worst the set pin would be sheared and the rod come flying backwards. Result - a near miss, a severe injury or, a good possibility, death.

One bright day several of the line personnel returned from the line and related the incident of the day. They were quite excited and quickly said: "Do you remember warning us about unloading the Tail Guns? Well, it happened. "X" hit the trigger bar and shot up the tail of another B-29".

Fortunately that was the "best result" and not the worst. After that the unloading of tail guns went by the book.

SARGE'S CASINO AT TINIAN

For some of us our major recreation was playing poker. The mainstays included a couple of sergeants and myself. Around paydays a bankroll of \$500 was needed to get in the game. Generally there would be several \$1 limit games with the winners getting together and having pot limit games. These winners would then enter our game hoping to make a real "payday". A line Sergeant built a table in the center of his tent complete with a skin-tight blanket on top. Eventually he re-designed the tent supports and got rid of the center pole. He also served drinks and snacks for us players. His fee was usually a quarter from each hand and whatever tips he received from the winner of each pot. He would usually get tips which ranged between \$1 and \$5.

Although the game was straight, the mainstays of the game, from experience, could tell when one of us had a good hand, when we might run a bluff and when we were trying to keep the outsiders in the game. Since our capital was so much greater than the outsiders it usually only took a couple or three hours to relieve these players of their money. Funny thing, these players never believed that they were doomed when they sat down to play. For us it was really a pleasant pastime - and a good source of money.

NIGHT MISSION OVER TOKYO

It was in late May 1945 that I was assigned to a night mission over Tokyo, substituting for an ailing tail gunner. Night missions were somewhat of a free-for-all since we did not fly in formation and each aircraft was assigned a sector as a target for their bomb drop. The drop was by radar. As usual the IP was Mt. Fuji, an altitude of 20,000 feet and the standard airspeed (probably 195 MPH). I believe there were about 200 aircraft making the run.

With the darkness of night and I don't remember any moonlight - one didn't think of any problems but kept an eye out just to catch sight of anything out of the ordinary. All of a sudden the sky lit up for just a moment, probably from a phosphorous bomb from the ground. About 30 feet behind, maybe 10 feet higher and 20 feet to the left (tail gunners right) was another B-29. It seemed close enough that you could nearly spit in the pilot's eye. Using the inter-com I quickly advised the pilot. I don't recall any maneuvering but I strained my eyes trying to get another glimpse of the aircraft - or any other aircraft. After dropping our bombs we headed home. No further incidents were encountered. This momentary glimpse of another B-29 was, certainly, one of my most frightful moments during my tour of duty.



EMBARRASSING MOMENTS - THIS GUY IS GONNA KILL US!!

When Lt. Walter Pytko was made Airplane Commander and assigned a crew, a few of us had came overseas with Walt while several crew members were from another crew. On his first mission as Airplane Commander we drew Osaka as the target and, specifically, we were to bomb a dam. We were carrying 4,000 pounders in the bomb bays for this task. What a thrill it was when the bomb load was dropped. Sitting in the tail a 15 foot upward thrust in the tail was something like a Roller Coaster ride.

After dropping our bombs and leaving the target area Walt Pytko invited me forward to the "Front Office". This was normal for most crews since the aircraft flew easier moving about 200 Lbs. from the tail to the nose. On approach to landing Walt had the Radar Operator, George Fanandakis, start the Putt-Putt (Auxiliary Electrical Power Plant) and I stayed in the Pilot's Compartment. After landing I crawled through the Bomb Bays in the Tube and entered the Central Fire Control room. All the crew in the back end were with their backs to the bulk-head and head between their knees.

"Get down" they shouted at me "This guy is gonna kill us!" I retorted "We've been on the ground for 5 minutes". Walt had made a perfect landing.

YOKOHAMA, JAPAN - MAY 28, 1945

One mission that I remember was over Yokohama on May 28, 1945. There were some 200 B-29 Aircraft on this daylight mission. Although I'm not absolutely sure I think Major Doyle was the Aircraft Commander and another Major was flying Co-Pilot. We were taking off early in the morning, between 2:00 and 3:00 AM. Over the intercom we heard the Pilot and Co-Pilot arguing about who was to fly the plane. Both were complaining about the dark and each insisted that they couldn't see. Finally Major Doyle consented to take over - but only as long as it was dark. When the sun arose the Co-Pilot had to fly the rest of the mission or about 12 hours.

Our flight to Japan was uneventful and, nearing the target, the planes assembled into formation. Our formations were usually by squadron and consisted of 10 or 12 aircraft in a V formation similar to the way geese fly when going South for the Winter. All was quiet in the skies as we headed for the target. As we were approaching the target the anti-aircraft guns start shooting. Then a lone Japanese aircraft appeared in the sky. As we watched the aircraft headed directly into one of the formations and rammed into one of our aircraft. We saw some of the crew bail-out and later learned that the crew was on its final mission before returning to the states. They had completed 34 missions only to succumb on their last flight.

On the way home I received a request from the pilot to scan for activity on the Island of Chichi Jima, a small island near Iwo Jima. The pilot descended to about a 5,000 foot level and flew over the Island. As I peered downward and slightly to the rear I saw flashes through what appeared to be trees. What it was, I soon realized was anti-aircraft batteries shooting at us. I quickly notified the pilot asking him to get out of there fast. He did and we returned to Tinian safely.

THE RETURN OF SMILIN' JACK

Smilin' Jack, a Boeing B-29 which was flown out of Chakulia, India, Hsin Ching, China and Tinian in the Marianas, was returned to the United States by a make-up crew with Major Oakes as the Airplane Commander. As to the rest of the crew it is beyond my recollection except for M/Sgt Pershing (Push) Mills, Flight Engineer, and myself, B. Vic Dison Jr., flying as Right Gunner. The Radio Operator, I believe, was from a crew from Saipan. There also were several passengers aboard the aircraft.

Since this is my story I'll relate a few introductory remarks covering the reason I flew home on Smilin' Jack. These remarks involve a folding table which I still have and intend to re-finish one of these days and contribute to a museum or equivalent.

I acquired the table at Kearney, Nebraska as we were preparing to go overseas. and brought to Chakulia, India on the Plane which was named "Superstitious Aloysious" (Re-named in Chakulia from a name I refuse to remember). The crew included Lt. Bob Derrington (Airplane Commander), Lt. Walt Pytko (Co-Pilot), Lt. Steve Jones (Navigator), Lt. Hank Captein

(Bombardier), M/Sgt Push Mills (Flight Engineer), Cpl. Marv Fears (Radio-Operator), Sgt Earl Fears (CFC, Older brother of Marv), Cpl. Dave Webster (Right Gunner), Cpl. Frank Wotus (Left Gunner), Pfc. George Fanandakis (Radar Operator) and myself, Cpl. Vic Dison (Tail Gunner).

When I left India and traveled to Tinian on the good ship USS GEN MCRAE, I had asked Push Mills if he would bring my table to Tinian when he flew there with Lt. Del Stevens. When the 25th Bomb Squadron arrived Push Mills produced the table.

As the War ended and we were preparing to return home, I was scheduled to fly with Major Childs, Squadron Commander, and his crew. After getting permission from the Crew-Chief to load the Table, The Flight Engineer overheard the conversation and immediately advised me that I could not bring the table back to the USA. Although the Crew-Chief said that he was the authority on what would be loaded on the aircraft and I could take the table home, I decided to change crews which was accomplished through Push Mills.

With Push Mills and myself assisting the ground crew headed by Crew-chief John Portegys, Smilin' Jack was made "ready" to return to the USA. It was sometime after dark that we headed down the runway on our takeoff. As the plane took to the air there was some problem with the lights. Instead of returning to the field Major Oakes decided that come Hell or High Water we were going home - so off we flew.

There was one incident that occurred during our flight home that could have been tragic. One of the passengers, a Colonel, went to light a cigarette. At that time we were transferring fuel and there was a very strong gasoline odor. As he moved his lighter towards his mouth I lunged toward him and knocked the lighter from his hand. I then gave him quite a tongue lashing without regard to his rank. He realized the problem and apologized for his actions.

Our first stop was at Kwajelein, a tiny island in the Pacific. In fact it was so small that after all the planes had landed there was no room to maneuver. Being the last plane in we were to be the first plane off. At takeoff time Push Mills was performing some needed minor repairs. This, of course, resulted in nobody getting to take off until we were ready to go.

Several pilots got a little hot and demanded that the Navy personnel put a tractor to Smilin' Jack and tow her out of the way. As a Navy enlisted man approach Smilin' Jack with a tractor and Tow Bar Major Oakes drew his 45 Automatic. He advised the Tractor Operator that anyone putting a Tow Bar to Smilin' Jack would no longer be on this earth. The Tractor Operator retreated quickly. After about 45 minutes we were ready to go and off to the runway we taxied.

Heading for Honolulu, Hawaii our radio ceased to function. The Radio Operator advised Major Oakes that we were to land at Johnson Island. Major Oakes declared that he wasn't about to try to land on a "postage stamp" in the middle of the night. We continued flying and landed early the next day in Hawaii.

This was our first place that we could enjoy a bit of home. After a shower and lunch we headed for town. I don't remember who I was with but our first experience was in a crowded bar

in Honolulu. We were seated with a couple of Canadians who had been Japanese Prisoners-of-War in Japan. They immediately got up to leave and we had a hard time to convince them to stay and have another drink. After their several years as prisoners they were not used to being able to act like free men. They told us how the prisoners would run to the outside and cheer the B-29s as they were making their bombing runs. The Japanese Guards would try to make them return to the buildings to no avail.

The next day we left for Mather Field near Sacramento, California. We were all anxious to see our first sight of the USA and, especially, the Golden Gate Bridge. Unfortunately the usual fog enshrouded the coastline so our first sighting was on the Radar Screen. Of course we were overjoyed to finally feel that we were really home and, fog or no fog, we relished the sight of "home". Shortly thereafter we landed at Mather Field and quickly unloaded our baggage and headed for the processing building. I also unloaded the table and, as I was leaving to be processed, I was greeted by one of the permanent KPs on Tinian. At my request he took the table and had it shipped to my home in Los Angeles, California.

As to Smilin' Jack that was the last I saw of her. I imagine that she ended up at Kingman, Arizona where all good aircraft finally ended up.

She was a good ship and brought us home.