



- Date of event:** February to June 1943. (While the 40th Group flew patrols over a much longer period, these months are selected to give a representative picture of what the tour in Panama was like.)
- Date written:** December 1987 - January 1988
- Written by:** Ira V. Matthews, Carter McGregor, Neil W. Wemple, Donald G. Starkey and William A. Rooney

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: This issue of MEMORIES is a departure in format. Previous issues have dealt with single episodes and experiences of combat crews, ground crews or individuals. This issue deals with the collective experience of the Group. It is being written for three reasons.

- (1) To get the story down on paper before it recedes so deeply into our memories that it may not be called up. If it isn't written by us now, it will never be done because this was a period in the war when nothing but the front line war was written about in history books.
- (2) To trigger the memories of others and to spark their writing about their experiences that these can be used in future issues of MEMORIES. This issue is not the definitive word on "The Rock." Indeed, it is expected that more authoritative and documented records will surface as a result of this issue. Drifting memories can then be brought into line and, where necessary, corrections published.
- (3) In the words of the TV football play-by-play sportscaster, this is being written for "those of you who joined us late..." A form of apology should be extended to those members in this category. Many of them have freely noted that they have heard more about "The Rock" than they ever want to hear.

As stated in point #2, one of our strongest hopes is that this issue of MEMORIES will trigger many responses. Ira Matthews has written four vignettes about experiences on "The Rock" it is intended that they appear as issues of MEMORIES in the future. As with the "Battle of Kansas" and the move to India from Kansas, the story of "The Rock" cannot be told in a single issue. We look forward to gathering and publishing stories more characteristic of past MEMORIES using these contributions.

## "THE ROCK"

It is probably best to get out of the way first a sociological hang up concerning "The Rock." Reference to "The Rock" by those who had been there to those who joined the Group in Pratt and later, was a nerve-scraping annoyance that received its very best description by Carter McGregor in his book, "The Kagu-Tsuchi Bomb Group." Here is what Carter wrote:

"Through Moss and Norton, I received my first indoctrination about the "Rock Fraternity."... The only living thing they ever strafed or bombed was a school of sharks, but since they had been on combat status, it put them in a different class from all the newcomers to the Squadron and the Group. About half the members of the Squadron had been on "The Rock," and those of us who had not, were made to understand that we were second-class citizens, not on the same level with the veterans of the early

days. I got so tired of hearing about that damn "Rock" and the hardships they had encountered that I began to wish they were still down there. At any informal gathering or at the club bar, we had to listen to countless stories of experiences and events of "The Rock" days. It really got pretty boring but there was no way to escape nor to avoid listening because they were the seniors, the veterans who had been tested and proven worthy, at least according to them."

Every word that Carter has written is true. It didn't change when guys like Walter Lucas or Jasper Woodruff or Doc Hall joined us. They had been party to actually dropping bombs seriously and getting shot at just as seriously but this mattered little to "The Rock Fraternity." Theirs was the inner circle that had endured something together. Carter well chose the word "Fraternity" to identify the group for in considerable measure it was like a college fraternity which is based on two premises--to gather people into the group and, equally important, to exclude others.

The non "Rock" fraternity was not completely innocent of this sociological business. When they got to India early, they took pleasure in excluding those who followed by referring to themselves as having been inhabitants of "The Old Area" of the base. It gave them an identity and a cachet. It would be interesting to learn when the last vestiges and references to the "Rock Fraternity" disappeared. It was probably some time on Tinian when that Rock took the place of the earlier one.

### The Place

"The Rock" is actually Baltra Island in the Galapagos chain of islands on the equator about 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador. The 13 large islands and dozens of smaller ones belong to Ecuador. One of the smaller islands, Baltra, is probably one of the few, if not the only, island level enough to permit a landing strip. Only about three of the islands were inhabited during the 40th's tour there. There is no fresh water on any but one or two islands. Fresh water for the military base was freighted down from Panama. There was no dock on the island consequently, water had to be brought from the freighter to the island by lighter. The Galapagos Islands are volcanic in origin and at least one island had an active volcano which erupted with considerable force during the time the 45th was stationed on Baltra.

It seems that every island in the archipelago had at least three names but Baltra (also called Seymour) was the name settled upon for the island on which the base was located. Support contingents manned the island including a peashooter unit, AA, a base organization and a small naval unit that flew some Catalinas. What was life like on the Rock and why was it so difficult? Ira Matthews described it thus:

#### Ira Matthews writes:

Because of the Humboldt Current which swept up from the Antarctic along the west coast of South America and then out to sea at the equator, the water around the island was extremely cold. The threatening nature of the terrain kept most people from exploring the island beyond the inhabited area. A small beach between Baltra and Santa Cruz was found and used for swimming. The beach area was inhabited by sharks, rays and giant turtles contributing to its infrequent use.

Ira records that housing was in tents but by the time the 45th was assigned to the island station in February 1943, dispersed barracks had been built or were under construction. Some useful auxiliary buildings were available. The BOQs were cement floored wooden structures. From about four feet from the ground level to the roofline they were screened. The carrying of canteens and side arms was mandatory.

There was misery enough for everyone. Beginning with the arrival of the 45th on the Rock, the entire squadron--officers and enlisted men--ate corned beef hash three meals per day for ten consecutive

days. The diet was broken on the eleventh day with salmon loaf. As Ira Matthews reports, all food came from cans. Spam, powdered eggs, a yellowish grease called butter. Bread seemed to be left over from WW I.

One vignette about the food deserves to be told. It says more than we should ever want to know about the contrast between Air Force and Navy. During the first 10 days of the 45th being on the Island, Harper Miller, squadron adjutant, wangled an invitation to dinner at the Navy mess. He returned to report the menu there that evening. It was topped off with peach pie ala mode.

Ira Matthews has also reported on the experience of Marvin Goodwyn's crew on one of the triangular (see following) patrol flights. On that flight, after being out about 1,000 miles, the crew opened their lunch container to find that each lunch consisted of one tin of oily sardines, two hard tack biscuits and a large green onion. The coffee turned out to be stone cold. (This story deserves its own issue of MEMORIES and will be published at a later time.)

Sharing top billing with food on the list of miseries was the all-pervading red dust. The volcanic ash surface of the island produced a dust about the consistency of talcum powder. Every breeze distributed this dust over everything. Clothes and bodies were covered with it. Whatever white bedding there was was shortly a red color. Blankets, work surfaces, work materials were forever covered with this red dust. Principal distributors of the dust were the motor vehicles. At approximately the time the 45th was assigned to the Island, Col. Henry K. Mooney (who was later to command the Group on its return to the States) became base commander. Promptly, a reduction in truck-created dust was achieved by oiling the roads. Perhaps the biggest single lift given to the ground force was when wooden racks were built into bomb bays of the squadron planes and laundry was flown to Guatemala and laundered in a civilian laundry there. Delivering laundry to the supply office and getting it back with any degree of certainty was always a game.

A building on the line was shared by Operations and Intelligence. Atop it was a newly constructed control tower. It was decided not to move the tower operations to the new site so the new tower location became available for other use. Initially, it was to be the Intelligence Office. It was pre-empted by the navigators and, in recognition of John Ivory, squadron navigator, it was dubbed "Ivory Tower."

Don Starkey, squadron navigator of the 44th, tells about the runway: "Large volcanic rocks lined both sides of the strip as you approached its southern end. The rocks had been stacked there by bulldozers when the runway was built. Other rocks were piled high at the far end of the strip posing additional hazard for a southern take off over shark—infested waters."

Don also records that he was told no rain had fallen on these barren islands in 13 years. The lie was given to this one tragic day in 1943. A set of airfield lights were shipped to The Rock from Panama and were installed. Authorities in Panama then ordered the 45th to practice night landings--without regard to the hazardous nature of even daylight landings on the runway. Captain Maurice Hooper of the squadron was assigned the first night landing effort. A tragic crash resulted with the loss of four crew members. Burial was the following day in a rainstorm that could be matched only by the worst monsoon in India. The tragic loss was made even the worse for pall bearers and squadron members as they lowered the bodies into the red, forbidding ground in the midst of this torrential downpour.

The amenities of the Operations-Intelligence building could be rated sparse to none. How such a nicety ever got there can never be explained but in the building was a fully operational kitchen refrigerator. Drinking water was cooled in the refrigerator. Its common accessibility gave little

opportunity to store anything more worthwhile. Ultimately, an unspoken agreement was arrived at wherein ownership of any drink in a container either can or glass, would be respected providing the owner's name was printed on the container. Eugene Brill, navigator and one of life's most congenial people was one of those killed on the night landing practice effort. He would willingly undertake almost any task in behalf of ground personnel confined to the island. On one occasion, on his own, he flew back from Ecuador case upon case of small cans of fruit juice. There was a limited demand for the cases because the refreshment was pomegranate juice. To ground personnel, not having access to the fleshpots of Guatemala City, Salina, Ecuador or Talara, Peru, this refreshment was a treasured commodity. Cans were removed from cases by the purchasers and put in the refrigerator. Ah, what a mistake. Thoughtlessly, the owners forgot to pencil their names on the cans. The chilled inventory lasted no longer than it took to put the cans into the cooler. A limited respect for personal possessions was obtained later.

One of the base amenities--perhaps the sole amenity--was a screened in theater with rows of benches. A different movie was shown almost every night. Attendance each night was so complete it was almost as if it were a formation. Amusingly, adjacent to the theater in the open air was a giant urinal available to everyone. With the nearest woman being 700+ miles distant, there was no great display of modesty employed prior to entering the theater.

On the flight line, the Intelligence Office received each incoming crew. Each crew navigator carried an overloaded kit of materials which he checked in upon completion of the flight and checked out in the morning prior to takeoff. Interrogation consisted of getting what weather information could be obtained from the impatient crews together with whatever ship sightings the patrols observed. This was transmitted in a special code to the VI Bomber Command in Panama after the final patrol plane had landed for the day. A counter separated the outer ready room from the slightly more secure room on the other side which served as the Intelligence Office and security room for the kits.

One exchange inevitably took place between the incoming combat crews and the Intelligence Officer and enlisted man on duty at the receiving window. Some combat crew member would say, "You're in Intelligence, what's at the movie tonight?" Clerks and officers on duty muddled through this question ineffectively until Louis Jones arrived from the Zone for assignment to the 45th. Louis had the presence of mind to call the base recreation office and inquire what movie was scheduled for that night. He then posted it on the counter for the incoming crews to read.

Interestingly, among the fauna of the tiny Island were stray sheep. Speculation as to how they got there took two routes. One was that some natives had attempted sheep raising on one of the inhabited islands and had put sheep ashore on Baltra and had not gathered all of them in when the sheep owner abandoned the Island. Another theory was that whalers from Europe and New England carried sheep aboard their ships that they might butcher them for fresh meat during their month's long voyages. Since the Galapagos Islands were a frequent stopping point for the whalers, it is theorized that they put live sheep ashore on the island intending to take them off when they set sail for home. Not all sheep were collected and the survivors bred and populated the island into the 1940s and later. The January, 1988, issue of National Geographic contains an article on the Galapagos Islands and reports that in the interest of preserving the ecological integrity of the islands, all domestic animals that had been introduced into the islands were being removed. These include sheep as well as pigs (never seen on Baltra). How the sheep survived on the island that lacked fresh water also gave rise to speculation. One theory was that there were rainwater ponds from which they drew fluids or that they had somehow adapted to salt water from the ocean.

(Note: Do not take the Geographic picture of the Islands in 1988 as representative of them in 1944.)

The dry land iguana ranks right up there in the finals as one of the world's ugliest creatures. For the most part, never having experienced man, these four feet long, prehistoric-visaged animals showed relatively little fear when approached. Accordingly, it was a natural for some wags in the squadron to capture any of the bigger ones around the camp and release them in the barracks when no one was present.

Ingenuity is one of man's defenses against misery. Plotting to relieve the misery of the food that could not be described as such (rather it was protein, carbohydrates, minerals and other materials necessary for the human body to ingest in order to sustain life.) gave rise to ingenious efforts. This included playing upon the good offices of the flight crews to bring back foods from Guatemala. There was an especially exotic German bakery in Guatemala City. Friendly crew members would be cajoled into purchasing a box of petit fours to bring back to the earthlings on the island. That took ingenuity but after the purchase had been delivered to the supplicant, ah, that was when ingenuity really began. First was to fend off its consumption by anyone other than the true owner. Just as important was to defend it from predation by ants.

Not even the ants of India were as fast at finding a sugared delicacy as were the ants of Baltra. Ingenuity was raised to a higher power to defeat them. Most often the box containing the deserts was tied with a string and the string suspended from the barracks ceiling. Lest additional measures were taken, the ants could be expected to come down the string.

No amount of ingenuity could prevail in one quarter, however. That was in extracting a 6-ounce bottle of Coke from the enlisted man who did duty at the bar of the officer's club. Precious cases of Coke were ferried down to the Island from Guatemala in bomb bays. To maximize their use, the Club officer dictated that no Coke would be sold by itself. It was to be used only for sale with a mixed drink. Non-drinking, Casper Milquetoasts could find no way around this dictum and so they went dry at the officer's club.

To say that the officer's club was modestly equipped would be giving the club all the best of it. There was one small room, however, that got all of the lighting and other attention it needed. In its center was a green cloth-topped table with eight-inch raised, boxed sides and a pair of dice on the green. Lighting that was dim elsewhere was bright enough in this room that no possibility of a shadow could be cast that would impede the reading of the numbers on the dice. A considerable amount of paper changed hands over this table. But never was a plain Coke sold over the bar.

At every base to which the 40th was assigned outside the U. S., outdoor plumbing was an inevitable part of the amenities. There was something different about the latrines on the Galapagos, however. Unlike other locations, as for example, India, China and/or Tinian, latrines had to be dug out of the dirt or coral. Not so on the Rock. They had to be blasted out of the volcanic rock on which the base was built. On one occasion that can only be mentioned here because it deserves fuller detail in a future issues of MEMORIES, Benny Slonina and Matt Sarich, together with other maintenance personnel, decided that a new enlisted men's latrine should be built. Sarich, according to Benny, announced that he would take charge of the blasting since he was from Pennsylvania and anyone from the Keystone state automatically qualified as proficient in the use of dynamite. The climax and ending of this story can only be hinted at here in order to whet appetites for the rest of the story: There was an explosion of considerable proportions.

Finally, there is the matter of our being watched. No matter that few locations on the planet could be more remote than the Galapagos. No matter that this was, after the Battle of Midway, the backwater of the war, the air base was being spied upon.

From primitively occupied Santa Cruz Island (one of the two or three inhabited islands and one of possible two that had fresh water) the island across the small inlet from Baltra, either a German or German sympathizer was observing the operations on Baltra and sending out radio messages of the patrol activities. Ultimately, one of the island inhabitants turned in the spy and Ecuadorian authorities removed him after being pressed to do so by U. S. authorities. In gratitude, the loyal native of the island was brought over to Baltra, entertained at the officer's mess, outfitted with GI clothes and returned to his home island. In appearance, his rugged build and bearded visage would have qualified him as something out of Central Casting for a mountain western movie. He could not speak English and no one on the base spoke Spanish yet the meeting was brought off in great good spirits.

### The Purpose

The entire reason for being--the patrols to and from The Rock--was based upon a theory. Early in 1942, Secretary of War Stimson and British radar expert (and one of the inventors of radar), Watson Watt, inspected the defenses of the Canal. Up until then, it was considered that any attack on the Canal would come from the Caribbean side. The war with Japan exposed the fact that the Zone could be attacked, successfully, from the Pacific side. Watt presented disturbing possibilities. He evaluated the Canal as "being unique in the world, possessing only four vital points, each of small area, but each so fragile that a single projectile on any of the four could cut this vital line of communications and two projectiles on any one of three could prevent its re-establishment within two years." It was agreed that the most probable form of attack would be a carrier-based raid from the Pacific. It was estimated that the Japanese could afford to sacrifice four carriers to block the use of the canal. Stimson reported to President Roosevelt that planes from even one carrier could cripple the Canal and if two or more carriers participated, there would be a strong probability of success. A means of intercepting outside the range of the Japanese carrier-based planes was urgently needed.

After a lot of backing and filling--and attempts to establish early warning radar locations--it became apparent that even if radar equipment and siting locations provided the Zone with early warning, defense of the Canal could not be effective if that defense had to come out to meet the enemy from the Zone. Somewhere about this time things seemed to come together. The importance of the Canal gave the need for its defense a high priority--such as it was. Patrol bases were established at Guatemala City, the Galapagos Islands, Salinas, Ecuador and Talara, Peru. (Consider that at this time, radar was treated at the security level about equal to that of the Manhattan Project.)

Then the theory and equipment came together. The theory was that all of the water in the Pacific Ocean was flowing toward the Panama Canal at 30 knots. A set of patrol planes, radar equipped, would sweep this body of water by daylight. The next day, the next body of water flowing toward the Canal would be swept. Patrols were established and flown so as to intercept any ship--especially Japanese carriers--moving toward the Canal. The web swept the seas between Guatemala and the Rock and between Salinas and Talara and the Rock. A triangular patrol went out each day to cover the southern approaches to The Rock. PBY Catalinas shared in the triangular security patrol.

As part of the theory, the Navy's job was to have submarines track and identify the location of every Japanese aircraft carrier every day and to send location information to the Zone. It was plotted by the VI Bomber Command on a Pacific map.

Continuing with the theory, whenever, a Japanese carrier was lost by the submarines, it was plotted as steaming toward the Zone at 30 knots, probably near the maximum speed of the Japanese carriers. If the carrier had not been located by the time it theoretically reached the outer edges of the

sweep area, an alert was declared and often maintained until the carrier was located or, until the threat to the Zone had passed.

In a monumental task of maintaining identity of friendly vessels that would pass through the sweep area, every friendly naval and cargo vessel in the free world was given three sets of recognition systems to be used each day. One system was the naval flags that every vessel carried. The letters of the signal flags had to be displayed in the correct order on the days it passed through the sweep area. A second recognition system consisted of colored flares to be fired off in the proper sequence given in the code book of the day. Finally, there were blinker signal identification codes. In theory, any vessel unable to flash the code of the day could be considered an enemy ship bent on sabotage of the Canal and could be bombed by the intercepting patrol planes. In fact, none were ever bombed and considering the infinite number of languages the ships operated under and the variety of national flags they flew, it would have been too much to expect that they would know with unflinching certainty, the signals for the day.

All patrol planes carried bombs. Guns were armed and test firings were made on virtually every flight. Alertness, however, could be classified as "relaxed."

One evening on the Galapagos, early warning radar based on the Island picked up returns from a cloud formation. Col. Mooney, base commander and a West Pointer, elected to turn the occasion into a full scale island alert. The nonsense continued from about sunset until full dark. This was an annoying interruption of the movie schedule that evening and some catching up at the dice table had to be undertaken.

Sea sweep flights were launched each day from the Rock and the three continental bases. Flights would go out one day and return the next. Flyers to the Rock had the enduring comfort of knowing that no matter how miserable was the flight to the Rock, they would be going back to their mainland base the next day. Not so was the case for ground personnel or for those who caught the assignment to fly the triangular security patrol. That flight began and ended on The Rock. Respite from The Rock's misery was relieved by three day passes to Guatemala for some but not all of the squadron personnel. How the ground crews managed to maintain the planes, service them and turn them around for the return flight the next day was an achievement little understood and, probably, appreciated only by the flight crews.

The monotony of the sea sweeps was to be matched by the same crews later as they flew the missions to Singapore, Yawata, Palembang and to targets from Tinian. But what was a typical flight like on these Rock patrols? Don Starkey, squadron navigator of the 44th has written his autobiography which is now in manuscript form. In it he spends a chapter telling about "Flying To The Rock." He has given us permission to quote from it here:

Don Starkey writes:

It's 1 a.m. on the morning of September 10, 1942, at our base at Guatemala City. I'm pondering this morning's flight set for takeoff at 6:00 a.m. It will be my initiation into the 44th. This time it will be my sole responsibility to navigate the B-17 from Guatemala City to the Rock. I made the flight only yesterday as a passenger just to see "how goes it." Somebody else did the navigating. They said it was to "give me a feel" for the mission.

We were briefed the day before on the flight pattern we would follow. The route was one among some 14 or 15 each of which would be covered by a separate bomber. Taking off at delayed intervals from Guatemala City, each aircraft would proceed to San Jose--a coastal town almost due south of the city. From there we would fan out over the Pacific to intersect an imaginary point in space and

turn due south. Each bomber would fly at approximately 6,000 feet, remaining as close to its assigned route as possible. Routes were spaced 10 miles apart to permit overlapping surveillance of the sea below. At approximately 150 miles from Baltra, each aircraft would take up its preplanned course and converge on the airfield. We would need only a map of Guatemala and its coast line and another of the Galapagos Islands. Once over the Pacific, we would use Mercator charts to follow our assigned routes.

Staying on course would require reading drift every 20-30 minutes and periodic observations of the sun using the octant to determine lines of position along the way. The LOP is always drawn perpendicular to the sun's ever-changing azimuth and, depending on the accuracy of the observation, the bomber would be located somewhere along the LOP.

Until now, I had practically no experience flying over water. I had made a flight or two over the Gulf of Mexico as a cadet to learn how to read drift from whitecaps. Since, for all practical purposes, whitecaps remain stationary as they rise and fall, using the bomber's drift meter, the navigator can determine his drift right or left of course and correct his heading accordingly.

Flying over water has its advantages. You don't have to worry about obstructions until you get close to land. And rough weather can often be avoided by descending near to the water's surface where turbulence is usually quite mild. Since we flew through an equatorial front almost every day, we would often swoop down and skim along the top of the ocean waves until the weather cleared.

My first flight was with Captain Forrest "Bud" Knox, a 25-year old veteran who knew his aircraft inside out. Never before had I met a flier who exuded such confidence. And he was totally cooperative during this and many subsequent flights.

We took off from Guatemala's single runway at 6 a.m. and headed for San Jose. Arriving at the coastal town, I can still see the long pier jutting out into the water as I entered our departure time in my log. I gave Knox a heading for our imaginary rendezvous point out over the Pacific where we would turn southward. For the next seven hours--that's how long it would take us to reach the islands--the crew will monitor my every word to the pilot. The Captain switches the bomber to the automatic pilot and settles back to enjoy the flight. In approximately 30 minutes we will turn due south to begin our long voyage.

I make entries in my log every 10-15 minutes: airspeed, altitude, temperature, drift correction, compass heading and other pertinent flight data. I will also record sun observation times but the lines of position will be plotted directly on my Mercator chart to show a visual picture of our progress.

During the early morning hours, the sea's blue water is calm. There are only a few scattered clouds in the sky. The sun has not yet fired the world. Since there are no whitecaps, I will use our forecast winds to estimate our drift and ground speed.

Reaching our time of arrival to change course, I give the pilot a new heading. The bomber makes a shallow turn to the right and levels out. Knox "clicks" his mike button twice signifying he had complied with my request. I look down at the aperiodic compass on which I have preset the azimuth ring to our new heading. We are exactly on course.

As the minutes tick by, the upper rim of the sun appears off our left wing. I wait for it to climb about 150 above the horizon before taking my first observation. Its azimuth is now about 1100 as measured from true north. The computed LOP crosses our course line within two or three miles of our dead reckoning position. So far, so good.



As the sun climbs the eastern sky, its azimuth increases and my plotted lines of position from its observation continue to rotate clockwise in a never-ending effort to cross our course in a perpendicular configuration. This gives us a good measure of our ground speed. To maintain our course, I now read our drift correction from the whitecaps below and correct our heading accordingly.

All surface vessels encountered during the search were challenged for identification, being required to hoist the secret colors of the day, to fire the correct colored flares in sequence or to use their blinker. Sometimes a ship would delay its response making it necessary for the pilot to descend and "buzz" the vessel to get the captain's attention. In a few instances, the ship's crew had to be motivated by firing a burst from the machine gun across the deck.

While the airmen were searching visually, the radar operator was scanning his screen for any sign. This was such an enervating job that crew members spelled the operator at the radar screen during the flight.

The long, drawn out missions gave us the opportunity to accumulate as much as 100 hours per month of flying time. As a crew member, you learned quickly which pilots would take unnecessary chances and which ones made it a practice to adhere to Air Force Flight Safety Regulations. Right away, you came to know with whom you would rather fly if you had any choice in the matter.

All day long we listen to the monotonous drone of the engines while watching the sea and the lazy clouds float by. To counter the boredom, some of the crew have brought magazines and books along to fill in the gaps as they periodically search the ocean below. Having nine crewmen aboard (pilot, copilot, navigator, bombardier, radio operator, radar operator and three gunners), it isn't necessary that each man search the sea at all times.

Every now and then Knox calls me over the intercom, "How's it going Starkey?"

"Everything looks good to me," was my standard reply. I wondered if he believed me.

I was to learn on this and subsequent missions that we most always encountered heavy weather about midway through the flight. It seemed an equatorial front was ever present requiring an hour or two of instrument flying. Although we generally ran into heavy rain squalls within the front, by and large the flying was smooth. When blanked in on all sides by the weather, we relied on radar for our eyes.

As we got closer to the islands, my anxiety began to mount. Throughout the day I had rechecked my figures many times. They showed us to be on course. But for any new navigator, you never acquire that feeling of ease until you see your destination up ahead. Reaching our latitude and longitude position where we would alter course for the Rock, I requested a heading change. Knox immediately changed course. - According to my calculations, we should reach the island in about 45 minutes.

Even though we are still about 130 miles out, I find myself gazing out the nose of the bomber in anticipation of sighting land. Clouds generally show up first, so I scan the horizon for their appearance. Sometimes they billow up to great heights and can be seen for great distances. At other times, they lay low over the islands. Time passes ever so slowly. I read the drift again. There is no change.

The Captain snaps his radio on but the compass needle "hunts" around the dial without coming to rest. We are still too far from the island to home on its radio signal. Suddenly, as far as the eye can see, clouds begin to appear on the horizon. Shortly thereafter, the compass needle begins to hover around "0" indicating the airbase is out ahead. Knox now takes over and rides the radio beam the rest

of the way. As we approach the landing strip, I glance down at my watch. My estimated time of arrival is off by three minutes. Not bad for my first flight, I think. We land and taxi over to the parking ramp where transportation is waiting to take us to operations then off to the barracks. We learn we are scheduled for takeoff the following morning at 6 a.m. to return to Guatemala.

Editors' Postscript: As noted in the introduction, one of the purposes of publishing the story of "The Rock" in this way is to trigger reminiscences by others that they may be used in future issues of MEMORIES. Long or short, humorous or serious, they will be collected and used. Many events are remembered that didn't happen. Members whose memories are sharper and/or better documented than those of the contributors to this issue should write the editors. Those corrective memories will be appreciated.

M.E. Carmichael is Treasurer and would welcome contributions to defray the cost of printing and mailing MEMORIES. If you want to help, make out a check to 40th Bomb Group Association and mail it to M. E. Carmichael, 2514 Oregon Avenue, Alamogordo, NM 88310. Harry Changnon is 40th Group Historian. The editors of MEMORIES are William A. Rooney and Robert L. Hall, 517 1/2 Ridge Road, Wilmette IL 60091.



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