



## THE FUNNY THINGS - PART 2

Editor's Introduction: In July, 1989, we published the first issue of MEMORIES with a collection of funny experiences members had during their tenure in the 40th in WW II. This is the second such issue. As with the first, these funny things that happened can be funny at the time, but do not appear so today. Or, they could have been dead serious at the time, but can be laughed at fifty years after the event. For some that these stories are funny depends upon the reader's sense of humor. When we opened the file to begin work on this issue, it was discovered that the file was too full to permit inclusion of everything in one issue so, there is sure to be another issue of The Funny Things in some future edition of MEMORIES. The need for stories for MEMORIES is never ending. If you have something to submit it will be welcomed.

**Date of event:** Approximately late 1943, early 1944

**Written by:** Ira V. Matthews (Deceased)

**Subject:** The General's Wife

War tales often reach the point where truth is ignored. One such tale is an account of a lady copilot on a B-29 ferry crew. In August, 1944, General LeMay arrived to take over the XX Bomber Command. "Old Iron Pants," as the combat crews dubbed him, was a leader of rugged combat missions in the Eighth Air Force over Germany before coming to India.

Whenever the General visited the 40th, we were much aware of his presence. Most were afraid to look him in the eye. It was almost as if a grim military deity was in our midst. He left us awestruck and tongue tied. After some rather ineffective missions and the unpleasant critiques that followed, we were convinced that Curtis LeMay was no ordinary general. A strict disciplinarian, he demanded perfect results on every mission. We were encountering severe technical problems with the early model B-29s. In addition, we did not have the combat experience of our Commander; therefore, he viewed our efforts with less than full approval. Most of all, he was not reluctant to inform us of his displeasure.

As our losses from Hump airlift operations and the combat missions combined to reduce our fleet of planes, a steady stream of replacement B-29s were being delivered to us by the Ferry Command. One new B-29 arrived at Chakulia flown by an unusual crew. The pilot was a captain, but his copilot was a WAAF lady pilot. After turning over the B-29 papers, the ferry crew repaired to what passed for our officers' club. News of the female flyer got around. In no time, several combat crew members found urgent and compelling reasons to visit the club. They immediately noticed she was a lady of imposing build, in the 30 to 35 age range. Although the lady was at our base for only a few hours, she made a lasting impression.

The next morning at breakfast, we were treated to a detailed description of the female B-29 pilot. The originator of the yarn about her must remain nameless. But, speaking with great emphasis, our buddy informed us that the WAAF pilot was none other than Mrs. Charles E. LeMay. Overnight this tale was passed about until it became a known fact throughout the CBI. We never learned if this droll foolishness ever reached our stern-faced General's ears. Perhaps not. No one was likely to have had the courage to repeat it in his presence.

**Date of event:** Uncertain  
**Written by:** M.E. "Red" Carmichael  
**Subject:** The "Oily" Lieutenant

We had a 2nd Lt. assistant engineering officer who made a habit of coming out to the line and nit-picking us to death. One day I saw this Shavetail coming and I told my assistant crew chief to go over to the #2 engine and tell the mechanic who was getting ready to drain the oil to wait until the lieutenant stuck his head up in the nacelle and then dump that bucket of waste oil on him. My assistant came back and said, "Red, the guy doesn't want to dump the oil on the lieutenant." So I sent him back with instructions you dump that oil then yell "Look out below."

Needless to say, the mechanic dumped the oil on the lieutenant just as the scenario was written. We fawned all over the guy expressing our sorrow about what had happened. I got the greasiest rags I could find to use to clean him up. He never bothered us again.

**Date of event:** Early 1945  
**Written by:** Eino E. Jenstrum  
**Subject:** Requesting Lumber for the Officers' Club--Tinian

Some of us left seat aviators were lounging around when the skipper walked in and said, "Up and at 'em; come with me." No one ever argued successfully with the skipper so we upped and at 'em. Out we went to a six-by-six truck, no questions asked. The skipper got in the front seat of the truck. There was a case of Schenley's Black Label on the seat between him and the captain, aircraft commander, driver.

We rode down to the wharf and got into line with, it seemed, all of the six-by-six trucks on the island. After about an hour, we were dockside. Low and behold, a ship was unloading plywood by crane one enormous sling load per truck. It came our turn. Our skipper got out, carried the case of Black Label to the edge of the dock and threw it in the water. A hatch opened near the water line on the near side of the ship. A seaman with a gaff latched onto the box, hoisted it on board, and miraculously, the boom on deck lifted a sling load of plywood, swung it over and eased it onto the body of the truck. There were four of us there to release the sling. The skipper boarded the truck, and we followed him. Our truck followed the truck ahead to the nearest Y-intersection. The fleet of trucks went one way, and we went the other. The officers' club, already framed, received a nice solid floor and plywood sides with enough left for a very neat bar behind which were shelves for the booze. One shelf was bare. There was no Schenley's to put on it. The requisitioning mission was complete, but no combat credit was given.

**Date of event:** Fall, 1943  
**Written by:** Robert L. Hall  
**Subject:** Two events on TDY in Gulfport

About October or November of 1943, the crews of Ira Cornett and Bill Hunter were sent on TDY to Gulfport, Mississippi, in a B-29 to test its gunnery system in the air over the Gulf of Mexico. Also sent along was a B-17 with crew and equipment to tow targets. I was CFC gunner on Hunter's crew and was delighted at the opportunity to try out the CFC system. It seems incredible in hindsight, but we were told that the CFC system had never been tested in flight.

It was not really much of a test. The B-29 that we took along had turrets, but no gunnery computer had been installed. Hence, we could not tell whether the system aimed properly, but we could at least operate the turrets and charge and fire the guns. Also we could point them in the general direction of the tow target, push the trigger and hope for the best. The men flying the tow target B-17 were not very happy about their assigned duty for understandable reasons.

I remember two humorous events clearly from our TDY to Gulfport. The first of these occurred as we arrived at the airfield in Gulfport. We had two complete flight crews aboard with the possible exception of radar operators, so we had either 20 or 22 men on board. Upon landing, we taxied after the 'Follow Me' jeep to a parking area that was surrounded by MPs. Behind a fence was a crowd gaping at our impressive, but, to them, unfamiliar super bomber. As at least 20 crew members climbed out one after another, the crowd more and more amazed. It was a scene reminiscent of the many clowns who climb out of a tiny car at the circus. Andy Doran, Cornett's tail gunner, watched this crowd reaction intently. Always a joker and a showman, Andy arranged to be the very last man to climb out of the plane. Then he leaned back into the rear door and (loudly enough to be heard by the entire crowd) yelled, 'Hey, Joe, don't forget to turn off the shower.'

The second event occurred a couple of days later as I walked alone across the base after finishing some work on the CFC system. As I walked past base headquarters, I paused for a moment to light a cigarette. At that moment a major came running out of headquarters and, seeing me standing next to any empty staff car lighting a cigarette, said in a questioning tone, "You drive?" I saluted smartly and said, "Yes, Sir, but..." "Drive me to the Officers' Club," he interrupted as he climbed into the car. "But, Sir..." "No buts, I'm in a hurry. Start driving." "Yes, Sir," I said, always the obedient soldier, as I climbed in and started driving. I asked where the Officers' Club was, but he seemed annoyed and said he had no idea. After a stop to seek directions, I drove up in front of the club, and the major jumped out and started walking away. I shouted after him, "Where shall I put your car now, Sir?" He paused and said, "My car? Isn't it your car?" I said, "No, Sir, I just happened to be walking by." He stared at me for a moment and then burst out laughing. "If I were you," he said, "I'd put it back in front of headquarters and run like hell," and he hurried into the club. Being always the obedient soldier, that is exactly what I did.

**Date of event:** Winter, 1943

**Written by:** Fountain L. Brown

**Subject:** A Saturday Night In Wichita

Kansas wasn't all bad--it had bright lights and nightlife in Wichita. During the weekends, many air crew personnel would go to the big city looking for entertainment. My routine was to climb aboard a bus in Pratt, ride the 80 miles to downtown Wichita, walk to the Chinese restaurant near the bus depot for hot coffee. Then I would go to the Allis Hotel for a room, then go to the hotel basement for a shoe shine and finally out into the bright lights. A young fellow in uniform was certain to find a dancing partner and warm companionship at the Shadowland, a dance hall in northeast Wichita.

On one such expedition, I met a black-haired beauty whose style of jitterbug dancing suited me perfectly. Other signs must have been positive because I obtained Audett Bond's phone number for future use. Eventually that time came, and I called and made a date. As I recall, a very expensive date.

I rode the bus to Wichita, obtained hot coffee, hotel room and shoe shine, then took a taxi to Clemon's service station on North Broadway for a particular brand of beverage. The taxi parked in front of the gas pumps while I went inside with the attendant. I was ushered to a back room for the special

beverage. The attendant unlocked the door, and we stepped into what must have been one of the largest caches of bootlegged booze in the whole dry state of Kansas. The cases were stacked to the ceiling along all the ways of the small room. The attendant didn't waste any time.

"Wadda ya want" he said.

"Johnnie Walker Black Label," I said.

"Twenty bucks," he said.

"Ouch," I said.

I paid the bill and returned to the back seat of the cab where I had another surprise. No, the sheriff wasn't waiting for me, my cabbie provided the surprise. As we drove away from the gas station, he asked if I'd like to hide my Scotch friend Johnny before we arrived in the downtown area. "Sure, but where?" I asked. Continuing to drive with his left hand, he reached over the back of his seat with his right hand and pulled up the loose seat cover dangling in front of my knees. "In there," was his delayed response.

"Well, I'll be..." I said, "These Kansas Crackers modify taxis as well as B-29s." Recessed into the seat frame was a cavity of just the right size to keep my Scotch friend from banging around while the lowered seat cover kept him safe from prying eyes.

The next stop was at Audett's house, then to a stop to pick up another couple. We proceeded to South Wichita where we were met at the door of a nightclub by another considerate person--a person who considered it proper to relieve us of a considerable fee as an admittance charge.

Once inside, we settled down for a party. The clip joint served all kinds of soft drinks that came with ice cubes and a stiff price. A glass of ice water in the middle of a desert wouldn't have cost as much as one did here. The mix was called a setup--the customer furnished his own illegal alcohol, and the house set him up with the mix.

The evening was young, the music was inviting, the drink was perfect. Audett qualified as perfect in every respect. So we danced--we all danced--we all danced at the same time while some inconsiderate person stole my 20-dollar bottle of bootlegged Scotch. The other couple was more fortunate because their bottle was small enough to be concealed in a handbag. But not mine. Oh no, I had to bring a saddlebag-size bottle and leave it unprotected at the table while we danced. Since none of the others drank Scotch, Audett and I found ourselves all alone. The party had just started, and we had nothing to put into a setup.

I just had to get another bottle, no matter what the cost. After all, there was a war going on, so who cared for one more expense when we had so many of them? I left the party and took a cab back to the gas station for another twenty-dollar bottle of Scotch. That cab had not been modified for bootlegging, so I tucked the bottle in the seat crevice behind my back.

After rejoining the party, I learned what a fellow should do if he was foolish enough to bring a large bottle into that club. Some clever Kansan had modified the table and provided a bottle rack underneath. Those friendly Kansans knew how to place their priorities in support of B-29 crew members. Not bad for a dry state. Meanwhile, the Saturday night party continued, and eventually the holiday ended without further mishap.

Sunday evening during the bus ride back to Pratt, I reviewed the events of the weekend and fixed them in my memory bank. They would often be recalled to give promise of another weekend in town--after payday.

Well, that weekend finally arrived, and I called and made a date. Same route in as before bus, coffee, room, shoe shine, taxi, Scotch, Audett, and dancing. After the bus ride to Wichita, I walked to the coffee shop, and as I approached the entrance, Audett came out of the restaurant with a girlfriend. After some conversation, we decided to begin the date at that time, so Audett's girlfriend departed, and Audett and I went about doing what most people did in downtown Wichita on a wartime Saturday night.

I didn't know that I was being stood up that night. I had accidentally arrived to catch the girls in the act of starting out on their own. Audett told me years later that she had decided to cancel the date with me and was downtown to find a new dancing partner. There have been times in our married life when I fantasized that the bus, on its way to Wichita, suffered a fiat fire. That would have caused me to arrive at the coffee shop after Audett had left the scene, thereby ending our relationship. Instead, I am the one to suffer for many long years. If anyone tells Audett I said that, I'll be in trouble again.

A chance meeting at the Chinese Restaurant placed us at a crossroad with the options to split or to stay together. We stayed together.

**Date of event:** February, 1944  
**Written by:** David Leventhal  
**Subject:** A Slippery Pan of Sausage

We were on our way out of Pratt to the port of embarkation near Norfolk, Virginia, en route to Chakulia. On the troop train, a few of us cooks were trying to get lunch made. Some of us had opened a full square pan of Vienna sausage in the boxcar which was to serve as our kitchen on wheels. While waiting for the field range to be lit, we placed the pan of sausages on the floor. The door of the railroad car was open, which was O.K. because we were going very slow. Without any warning the train made a slight turn and slowly the pan, which contained our lunch, started moving toward the door. All of us just stood there without moving a muscle, watching as the pan made its move right out the door. Someone made a grab for it, but the effort was way too late. To this day I often think about that event, and I try to picture the look on the face of the person who came upon that pan of sausage and his effort to figure out how such a feast got there.

**Date of event:** 1944 or early 1945  
**Written by:** Carmon R. Strobel  
**Subject:** A Hump Memory I Look Back On (Maybe hoping it will go away)

One experience I will never forget occurred on a trip back to India from Hsinching on Col. Wemple's plane. While over the Hump, we lost one engine, and we were losing power on a second engine. Col. Wemple ordered bomb bay doors open, chutes on and for us to take positions for bailing out. We waited for what seemed like an eternity for the signal to jump. I was next to last in the jump order. The Crew Chief was behind me so I told him he would have to push me out. He was having a diarrhea attack at this time and was white as a sheet. I must have been, too. He said, "O.K., but who is going to push me out?" Fortunately, Col. Wemple regained control of the second engine, and we were able to get to Chakulia safely.

**Date of event:** Spring, 1945  
**Written by:** Norman Larsen  
**Subject:** Big Tai and The Binjo Box

Different types of humor manifested themselves in the prison camp at Rangoon. One of them was what I call black humor. Another type was what I could only call "inside humor" which wouldn't even be funny to a POW in Germany.

One day, some of our guys put on a show in one of the upstairs rooms of Compound 8 in Rangoon prison. Next to the "stage" there was a box and above the box, written on the wall, was the legend, "This box reserved for the Big Tai." As we came into the room and saw this sign, we all got a tremendous laugh. To anyone else, it would be nothing.

You see, the box was a binjo box (a facility that served as our toilet). The "Big Tai" was what everybody called the Jap prison commandant. Big Tai was a military man to the core. He had a great deal of dignity, and he never relaxed his military bearing. I can remember when we were in the cell block, and we would watch during a air raid. Big Tai would come out of his headquarters and have an orderly bring out a chair. He would sit out there until the all clear sounded. We could see Jap soldiers running around and diving into foxholes. But Big Tai sat there motionless and erect until the raid was over. The idea of this very military officer of the whole place squatting with his pants down over the binjo box was, to us, extremely funny.

Humor is where you find it, but sometimes it doesn't play as well in Peoria as it did in Rangoon.

**Date of event:** India, 1945  
**Written by:** Merton H. Jones  
**Subject:** Gertie of the 40th

At past 40th Bomb Group Reunions, on several occasions the name, "Gertie," has come into conversations when recollections are being tossed about. It is not surprising that a few wives have asked, "Who was Gertie?"

I first met Gertie on a railway platform at an unnamed station somewhere between Calcutta and Chakulia. We, Bob Coplay's crew, were returning from a not great three-day pass in Calcutta. Our compartment door was open to the noisy, busy, and smelly passenger platform when this gentle, white and brown, about fourteen inches high, female canine appeared. She was busy doing her thing, begging something to eat.

An offering of peanuts and Hershey bars lured that unsuspecting critter inside our compartment and was yet there when the train pulled out. This dognapping was accomplished without planning or the slightest pangs of conscience. We had heard that half-starved natives ate dogs and obviously we were saving this poor thing from becoming Dog-Kabob. By the time we arrived in Chakulia, she had been named Gertie. No special reason.

Gertie adopted the crew immediately and was rewarded by a bright red collar which she wore with considerable pride. Her bed was an old pillow under Smitty's cot (Oscar Lee Smith, our Bombardier-Navigator). It was of little concern to her that Smitty came from Texas. It soon was apparent that Gertie hadn't assigned herself to a single crew. She was a part of the 25th Squadron, and because the mess hall belonged to the 40th Bomb Group, she extended her responsibilities over the whole base.

She was loyal to Copley's crew in her fashion. She would watch us gather our gear and leave on a mission, then go with another crew until we returned. In a matter of a few days she became the Base Official Busybody. She knew the latest and oldest rumors and what was cooking at the mess hall. If she didn't go that way at meal time, you could forget it!

Gertie's instant popularity base-wide was probably due to her appearance. She didn't seem to be any special breed of dog. Her general configuration was sort of beagle/fox terrier and Heinz, but mainly, it was her personality and impartiality that was first noticed. She was not impressed by rank and seldom turned up her nose at the mess hall offerings. She caused us to remember a dog or two we had known and brought a little wisp of home to Chakulia, a place I recall as having absolutely no favorable attributes.

Gertie never wasted her energy. Her short-legged pace was a dignified trot if she couldn't hitchhike. There never was any senseless jumping about or excessive tail wagging and barking. In most respects, she had class until, that is, she got caught up in a natural animal phenomenon of female dogs. She seemed hellbent to get pregnant. This period in her life was a source of embarrassment to Copley's crew. Others were amused or watched in awe. Her choice of contributing males was in exceedingly poor taste, and the lineup seemed endless. Her courting was witnessed base-wide and throughout the daylight hours. She would return exhausted each night to her pad under Smitty's cot, only to be up at the crack of dawn to greet a group of mutts that had gathered during the night.

After several days of this outrageous conduct, she brought the episode to a halt with vicious snarls and bites at her lovers, and returned to her neglected "Busy-Body" duties. The gestation period was uneventful, and the Flight Surgeon pronounced her fit to bear young. Smitty found a beer carton for her pad.

The day of delivery was as usual as days ever got at Chakulia. The unusual aspect was what was delivered! Gertie brought forth the weirdest collection of pups in all of India. She was extremely proud of her efforts and even bragged about them. Our first impulse was to drown the whole lot, but Gertie strenuously vetoed that idea.

Not long after the arrival of the pups, Copley's Crew was ordered stateside, and here my share of "The Saga of Gertie" must end. I have heard, but not confirmed: 1) That Gertie was flown to Tinian to continue her duties there, and 2) That at war's end some fancy paperwork was employed (or avoided) to get her aboard a plane to the States.

I hope that others who knew Gertie will give us more about this extraordinary little, friendly dog, who helped us win a war.



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