

# **WWII Experiences of Capt. Richard C. Hurd**

## **308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H) 425<sup>th</sup> Squadron**

### **Preface**

The reader's appreciation of the background events that lead to my war-time experiences and situations warrants review of prior influences. My brother, Don, and my exposure to aviation and military began quite a number of years before I entered the service. In the early and mid-1930s, he and I used to ride our bikes out to Trenton Airport at West Trenton, New Jersey, about three to four miles from our home. Luscomb Aircraft manufactured small, single-engine planes there and we volunteered to wash them down as an opportunity to be around airplanes and the people associated with them. In the same general time period, we both were members of the Boy Scout Troop at St. Paul's Methodist Church. This opened the door to joining the 112th Mounted Boy Scout Troop. This unique organization was started by First Lieutenant Cecil Burbank, the man in charge of the 112th Field Artillery of the New Jersey National Guard. His son, Cecil, Jr., was about the same age as Don and me. As a way of broadening Cecil's experience, Lt. Burbank conceived the idea of asking the George Washington Council to allow two boys from each troop to participate in a Saturday morning period of riding the horses stabled at the 112th. These horses included light draft horses to pull the 75 mm guns, riding and jumpers belonging to the governor and members of the New Jersey State Legislature, and polo ponies used for the Sunday afternoon matches. Thus, we were exposed to military discipline and the regimen associate with precision riding for fairs, horse shows, etc. throughout the state. (Unfortunately, both Cecil and his father were killed in World War II.)

Our next exposure to the military was the mandatory participation of two years in the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) while attending Purdue University (Don started in 1935; I started in 1938). They, too, had 75 mm guns, but were hauled by trucks, not horses. We had to man, maintain and mock fire the 75 mm's. Naturally, the discipline, inspections, etc. were part of our life.

The next significant exposure to aviation came for me in early 1941 when I was selected to participate in the federal government-sponsored (CAA) Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP). We were instructed by civilian contract pilots in Piper Cubs. Some had 40 horsepower; others had 65 horsepower. That lasted all spring. I soloed and accumulated about forty hours of flight time; however, our instructor quit, and we had to finish up after a month's delay with another instructor. This pushed my readiness for the CAA flight test into late May. I passed the physical and the written test easily. However, other events came into play. Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, East Hartford, Connecticut had tendered me an offer of a summer job as a Junior Engineer starting June 5th at \$.60 per hour (a fabulous amount in those days). It was an opportunity I could not afford to pass up. The net result was that could not wait for the CAA pilot to come up from Indianapolis (he had kept putting it off for more than two weeks). At the last possible minute, I boarded the train for Trenton, saw my folks for a few hours and went on up to Hartford to be there on the appointed day.

My interest in aircraft engines had been piqued by my association with Luscomb planes. The previous summer (1940) I had hitch-hiked to Patterson, NJ to try to get a job with Wright Aeronautical, which designed, developed and produced the Wright Whirlwind radial engines (an early version of which had carried Lindberg across the Atlantic in 1927.) Wright wouldn't even let me in the gate to talk to anyone.

The three months with Pratt & Whitney Aircraft was eye-opening. Although I had three years of mechanical engineering behind me, I had never been in a plant where mechanical products were made. That summer was a great learning experience and I got to know quite a number of the graduate engineers who were Project Engineers when I rejoined Pratt & Whitney in 1950.

## **MY WARTIME STORY**

### **JOINING UP**

Don [older brother] joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in mid-1941 for cadet training as a pilot to avoid getting drafted as an infantry G.I. By the spring of 1942, the war

was on. I had met Betty Willingham and I had a student draft deferment. However, I was fed-up with being a student.

About March 1942, I went across the Wabash River to Lafayette, Indiana to the Air Corps recruiting office to sign up for pilot training. With my engineering and aviation background, I passed the written exam with a 98%. (I was a shoo-in!) The let-down came that afternoon when a sergeant told three or four of us that we were ineligible because of a partial color blindness. To make a long story short, the CAA required that one pass only 50% of the color plates but the Air Corps required 75% and I was in between. I was so disillusioned that I called my dad in Trenton. After hearing the whole nine yards, he suggested I catch the train and come on home to discuss it. I cleaned out everything in my rental room and dropped out of Purdue.

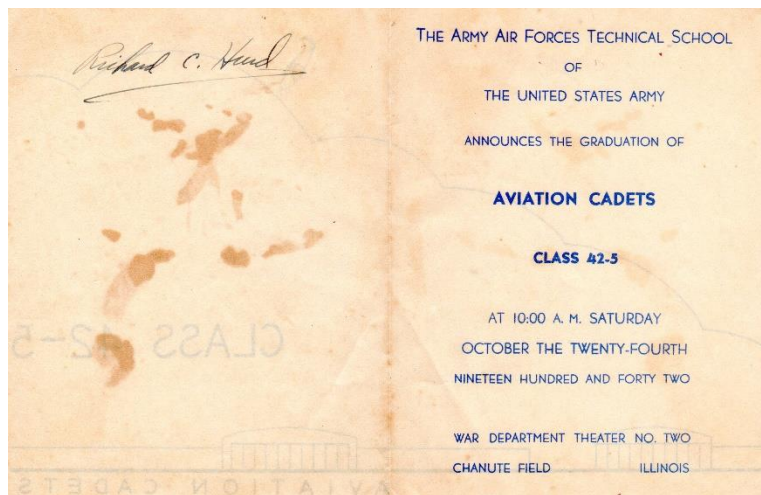
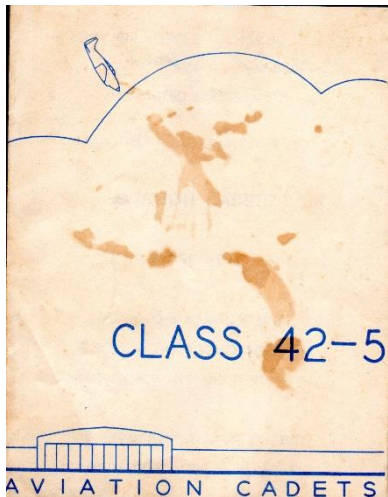
At Dad's suggestion, we went down to the Army recruiting office at the Trenton post office. The resident sergeant could not come up with anything. As we left the office, I noticed a poster on the back of the door that listed opportunities for Cadet Training leading to appointment as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Corps as a Communications Officer, Armament Officer, Meteorology Office, and other, including Engineering Officer! I turned and asked the sergeant about this program. He knew nothing but recommended I write to the address listed about being admitted. Since I met all the requirements (primarily three years of engineering at an accredited college), I wrote that evening and stayed at home in Trenton while waiting for a reply. When it appeared that it would be several weeks, I applied for a job at Fleetwings Aircraft at Bristol, PA (just down the Delaware River from Trenton). They hired me as a detailer's helper. Fleetwings specialized in stainless steel airplanes. They were building a U.S. Navy single-engine trainer and were designing a large single-engine torpedo bomber. My job was to help keep track of the overall weights and moments by getting the prints to the weight people and feeding their results back to the designers. It was interesting and educational. The people were helpful and nice. After about a month of work, the papers arrived from the U.S. Army Air Corps directing me to report to Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois.

On June 4, 1942, I was sworn in as an Engineering Cadet in the class of 42-5. Because they needed people so badly with engineering backgrounds, no one was washed out. The courses were elementary, both "technical" and administrative.

Physical demands were minimal. For the first two months newer cadets were roused out of bed at 4:30 a.m. for early chow. During the later 2-1/2 months we slept in until 5:30 a.m. Close-order drill followed inspection of beds, gear, uniforms, etc., with white gloves on the floor, windows, walls, latrine, etc. Classes started at 8:00 a.m. and ran until about 10:30. Then exercises and obstacle course runs. More classes in the afternoon. More close order drill, etc. Food was excellent (fed us on \$1.00 per day when regular enlisted students were fed for \$.47 per day). Hazing was non-existent.

Halfway through our course they gave us a long weekend off. Since I knew the date in advance, and Betty and I exchanged letters almost daily, she arranged to take the train to Indianapolis to stay with a girlfriend. Additionally, they arranged for us to go to Lake Webster, northeast of Ft. Wayne. While there, I proposed, and she accepted. I didn't have a ring and had no money to buy one, so that came along about two years later.

### Cadet Graduation bulletin



I graduated as a Second Lieutenant in November 1942. Orders sent me to Salt Lake City, Utah, 2nd Air Force Headquarters for assignment to a heavy bomber training base (Cadets had some preference for assignments; the top of the class usually got one of their three choices; the prime choice seemed to be P-47s at Richmond, Virginia).

While at Chanute a number of us teamed up to go to Champaign-Urbana on weekends. One of these was Rufus Koerting (Kurt) from Lincoln, Nebraska. He had a car! Since he was also going to Salt Lake City, he offered me a ride. We stopped over with his folks for about two days enroute.

**Photos of Dick Hurd with fellow Cadet, Rufus Koerting, taken at Highland Park, Illinois.**



*Cadet Rufus Koerting*



*Cadet Richard C. Hurd  
Chanute Field, Rantoule, Ill.*

Photo bottom right, labeled: "This is the picture I said I would give you to give to your mother Richard C Hurd as an aviation cadet taken July 1942 at Highland Park Ill"

Prior to assignments throughout the west, we had about five days and could get passes each evening to go into town. Kurt still had his car so he and four others teamed up. The question was - where to find some nice girls. I suggested we try the sorority houses at the University of Utah. At our third sorority we hit pay dirt! Five girls had decided to stay home to celebrate one of their birthdays. They invited us in to join in the celebration. We put on dance music, sat around, and talked, etc. A little later in the evening we all decided to go out. I had my eye on a cute, small, pretty girl, but so did one of the other fellows. While the girls were upstairs getting ready, the two of us drew straws or flipped coins, or something), and I won. Pleasant evening.

Assignments came. Kurt went to Walla Walla, Washington. I was sent to Wendover, Utah, 120 miles west on the Nevada border. The 308th Bomb Group (H) was there with Consolidated B-24s. I was assigned as Assistant Engineering Officer in the 425th Squadron under 1st Lt. Bob Manion. We spent the month of December there. Since training went on 24 hours a day, Manion covered the first shift and I got the second shift. We had tarpaper barracks with one coal fired pot-bellied stove. Also, tents on the flight line with coal stoves. Boy, was it cold!

### **Photos of Wendover, Utah**







Nov



Equipment of  
the 1st...





**Squadron Hike January 1943**









Photo: Leppaman and Piro



Most of the activities were routine. However, a couple of unusual events occurred. During one practice formation flight (another squadron) a trailing B-24 ran into his leader. That broke the right vertical stabilizer off which stuck in the nose of the other plane. The leader crashed. The second plane landed with the stabilizer still stuck up front. Another time, the pilots were telling me of flying low level across the Great Salt Lake at ten feet above the railroad trestle at night with one with landing light on directly at an oncoming train - no report on how the engineer of the locomotive reacted. I had the opportunity to accompany one night flight on a five or six-hour training mission. The only excitement was that the navigator had us head due east over Salt Lake City at about 6,000 feet altitude. He said to hold course for one-half an hour. The pilot told him he could go straight, but the plane was turning north to avoid the Wasatch Range mountains which were straight ahead! The moonlight on the snowcapped peaks at 9,000 feet was beautiful.

My contact with the girls in Salt Lake City soon became significant. The first weekend, Manion arranged to get a jeep so we could have some dates. The second weekend the Operations Officer joined us in a command car. The third weekend the Squadron Commander arranged for a staff car. The word was getting around. Each time I was with the same girl, and she always lined up dates for the other fellows. We fellows usually stayed in Hotel Utah owned by the Mormons, in a

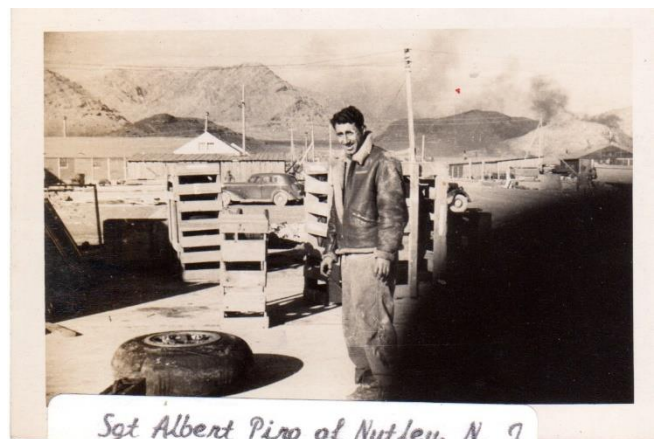
communal room normally used for trade or sales events. Rates were cheap that way.

About the first of 1943, the group moved to Pueblo, Colorado. It was a newly opened field, and the accommodations and facilities were not as primitive. The first month was a continuation of flight training for the air crews. Our Engineering Section shaped up quickly and did good work. The line chief was an old timer who knew his way around. He helped us get organized and taught us how to get through the military paperwork and how to get around it. He tended to be somewhat of a good-off, but the number two man, August (Gus) Niebuhr, a tech sergeant with four years experiences was very diligent and made up for the Master Sergeant's shortcomings.

### Photos of Pueblo, Colorado



*M/Sgt Gus Niebuhr  
M/Sgt Beck*



*Sgt Albert Piro of Nutley, N. J.*





Manion



While at Pueblo, I received a call from a Pentagon "bird colonel" asking if I could meet him at Salina, Kansas where Don was stationed. The squadron commander arranged for a training flight of B-24s to go there and I accompanied them. I got to visit with Don. Also, straightened out a glitch created by our Dad writing to his congressman about Don sleeping in a tent and my uniform allowance (\$150.00) being late. [Author's Note: In an interview with grandson Tripp Smith, Dick stated, "My brother Don was stationed for quite a while down near Tucson, AZ. While he was there, they put them in tents. Very dust, dirty, gritty, and sandy. Don wrote to our father... I had just graduated from 42-5 class in engineering school and I was supposed to get \$150 for uniform allowance and it didn't show up.... My dad wrote

a letter to his congressman in NJ and that went to the Pentagon...Of course, Don and I said this was not much of a problem. The colonel realized my dad got carried away and the congressman made a big deal out of it. When the war was over, I looked at my TOI file and in the upper left-hand corner it said, C I -Congressional Interference. So, I decided I didn't want to stay in the service. They take a dim view of that.]

On January 15th, the "flight echelon" departed for Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, FL. The "ground echelon" packed up all the equipment for overseas deployment and then did close order drill on the ramp every day for a week or so. Manion was in the "flight echelon" who were to fly the B-24s via Puerto Rico; Georgetown, British Guiana in South America; Natal, Brazil; Ascension Island, Gold Coast in West Africa; Khartoum, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan; Aden, Yemen; Karachi, India, etc.

The "ground echelon" was to head out by troop train and by troop ship. (the rumors had us going to England so some of the sharpies, including refueling sergeant Albert Piro from Nutley, NJ, stocked up on nylon stockings to impress the local girls). Then orders arrived giving everyone six days of leave prior to shipping out.

Since Betty had moved with her folks to Arlington, VA, I contacted her as well as my folks. We met in Trenton, N.J. after I puddle-jumped via Lockheed-Lodestars and DC-3s across the country in a whole series of snowstorms: Pueblo to Wichita, to Chicago, to Columbus, to Pittsburgh, to Philadelphia. We all had a great visit, but all too short. When I tried to get airline reservations to return to Pueblo, no planes were flying because of the weather. I quickly altered the plans and caught a train to Chicago and then on to Denver.

## **DEPLOYMENT OVERSEAS: Troopship from San Francisco to Bombay, India**

Soon after arriving at the base our departure orders came to proceed to San Francisco. The first leg was via troop train on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. The timing was such that we passed through the bottom of the Royal Gorge just at sunset. It was spectacularly beautiful. By 4:00 a.m. we were in Reno with the



temperature about 20 degrees below zero. We were delayed an hour or two to thaw out some of the cars. The brake systems were frozen. So were we. The next day we passed through the Sierra Nevadas with showsheds and snow banks higher than the train. I fell asleep in the mountains. I woke up about 4:00 p.m. All the windows were open and we were passing through orange groves.

We debarked at Camp Stoneman, Pittsburgh, CA, northwest of San Francisco. We stayed there for five days. Some of the fellows got into the city. I didn't. Then we were all loaded on large ferryboats and taken down the river to a Naval dock in San Francisco. We were marched off the ferry, crossed a covered dock and boarded the U.S.S. West Point (formerly the S.S. America, the queen of the U.S. pre-war trans-Atlantic lines). All told, they had 10,000 army troops and navy crew of three or four hundred. (Unlike the troops sent to England on the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth, which made the crossing in five days, we did not share bunks.) The officers had staterooms on the upper decks, the enlisted men on lower decks (I'm sorry to say that an all-black aviation construction battalion was put in the bottom hold, reached only by vertical ladders through steel deck plates.) We had twenty-one officers in steel mesh bunks, four high, hung from the walls in a suite which accommodated two people in peacetime. Several amusing incidents occurred early in the trip. First of all, one of our group got seasick the first night! However, in the morning, we found we were still at the dock.

The U.S.S. West Point departed San Francisco about 4:00 p.m. on February 15, 1943. A single destroyer escort proceeded on a straight course for 150 miles, about 7 hours at 22 knots. As soon as the destroyer turned back, our ship started a zig-zag course, changing direction every 30 seconds. Needless to say, the Navy personnel put the rudder hard over each time. The first time caught us by surprise and dumped a good number out of the bunks onto the steel deck. Others sat bolt upright, banging their head on the bunk above. Fortunately, I had a top bunk athwart ship and I didn't sit up. Once we learned from a Navy crewman what was going on, we settled down for the night. The zig-zagging ceased about 2:00 a.m. as the threat of a Japanese sub intercepting one ship in such a large ocean was minimal. Next thing we knew, bells were clanging, sirens were blowing and running feet heard in the companionway. Some guys sat up, banged their heads again and confusion reigned. A passing sailor said it was just the Navy's way of setting pre-dawn "general quarters." Silence descended. All of a sudden - WHAM! Confusion

reigned once again. BAM! It turned out to be the Navy gunners were test-firing the 5" gun mounted immediately above us.

The voyage turned routine after the usual bout with sea sickness for the first day or two. The weather was beautiful. The Pacific Ocean blue and serene. Crossing the equator, King Neptune initiated selected representatives with an appropriate ceremony. All of us were given wallet cards giving the date, etc. The first stop was Wellington, N.Z. The ship "hove to" off shore as small boats unloaded mail and diplomatic people. Underway in 1/2 hour.

Rumors said that Jap subs were lying in wait on the direct route to Melbourne, Australia. In any event, our course passed south of Tasmania Island. This took us into the edge of the Antarctic Ocean. The wind was fierce, about 50 knots from the west. As we headed directly into the oncoming swells the 30,000-ton ship pitched severely. Several of us worked our way forward on the top-most deck by pulling on the railings against the wind. The sight of the waves breaking solid water ten feet over the bow was awesome and exhilarating! We put into Melbourne harbor alongside a long quay. The ship took on fuel and stores. Five thousand army men disembarked for duty under General McArthur. The rest of us were given several hours of marching back and forth to get exercise. Of course, a few slipped to visit the local spots of interest. All were accounted for when we re-boarded and moved out six hours after arriving. A scary situation developed about two days later. One of the men developed spinal meningitis. He died soon afterwards and was buried at sea with full military honors. The entire ship's complement was on deck as taps was played. To reduce the possibility of exposing others, we were confined to quarters and divided into groups to go to mess separately. Fortunately, no one else came down with it. Thereafter, we spent most of the ten days in the Indian Ocean lounging on deck in the sunshine. A day or so out of Bombay, the ship "hove to" and a large raft of oil drums and wood structure about 40' square and 25' high was launched overboard. The ship then pulled off about five miles and the 5" guns engaged in target practice. We army guys were somewhat disturbed when no hits were recorded. So they had to draw closer to sink it so as not to be a navigational hazard. We learned later that the time spent was more to accommodate the slack high tide at Bombay than anything else. We docked at Bombay on the 31st day out of San Francisco.

Our contingent from the 308th Bomb Group (H) was split into two sections. Most of the enlisted men boarded an English coastal steamer for the trip to Karachi. (They later said the accommodations and food were awful.) [Author's Note: In interview with grandson Tripp, Dad said "They had to hold the bread up to the light to see the weevils."] I was with a group of officers who went by regularly scheduled trains. It took six days to get to Karachi via Lahore across the Sind desert. The trip was hot and boring. Our engineering people from all four squadrons (373rd, 374th, 375th and our 425th) were assigned to help strip a damaged B-25 at the air base. The last of our group, including me, were there for thirty days. Each day, one officer and about twenty men departed via commercial rail for the three-thousand-mile trip east across India to the air bases in upper Assam province. The procedure was simple. The officer was given \$1500.00 in rupees (local currency) to buy tickets, food, etc., en route to Calcutta. The British Army arranged transport on to Assam (more on that later). Those of us at Karachi got into town several times (the airfield was ten miles out). Nothing as impressive as the dinner we had at the Grand Hotel in Bombay, but acceptable and a change from mess hall food. It was hot and dry. We wore khaki shorts and shirts, pith helmets and desert boots, locally acquired. Also, we carried 45 caliber automatic GI pistols with a cartridge belt. (I have a picture at home to prove it.)

### Photos of Karachi



*Ross McLeod, John Foster*

**Photos: left, labeled, "Norm Wexler, Bill Halpine, Dick Hurd"**

**right, labled: "Ross McLeod, John Foster, Ray Andrews"**

## INDIA

My trip across India was less burdensome than for others. They arranged for the last fifty or so to travel together and took over an entire railroad car. A Captain, an Intelligence Officer, was in charge. Our trip departed Karachi about suppertime so as to cross the Sind desert at night (too hot during the day). This desert has the distinction of being the driest one in the world, averaging 8% relative humidity. The first large city was Lahore. We found out that the Indian people's "slow-down" as a protest against the British rule meant finding our car isolated on a siding each morning. Since all railroads have a telegraph shack every mile, it meant hiking to the nearest one and arranging to get picked up by the next train through. Thus, it took about ten days to get to Calcutta. No sight-seeing on this occasion. Wide-gauge rail north about 100 miles, transfer to narrow gauge, to a British camp on the west bank of the Brahmaputra River.

### Photos of Calcutta: Hotel Calcutta; Firpo's Restaurant



**[From grandson Tripp Smith's interview:** In our group there were four or five of us who had a compartment and this had things come down with leather seats and the doors open to the side. We had a guy, Jim Petz, [who said], "I wonder what would happen if I throw bananas up there?" He threw bananas into the fan. That, of course, got banana stuff all over the place. Everybody's clothes had bananas. The bananas had seeds in them. Black seeds about a large BB size. You bite down and all of a sudden you say, "What is in this banana?" They are all that way. All Indian bananas have black seeds in them. They are hard."]

The overnight stay there was interesting. The mess line was in a large clearing in a bamboo forest. Throughout the area were about fifty or sixty "wogs" (natives) with long bamboo poles with streamers on the end. We soon learned that they tried (mostly unsuccessfully) to keep large hawks from swooping down and picking the meat serving out of your mess kit. Incidentally, this was the first time we encountered serving English Army tea from a huge pot, about two feet across, by dipping your canteen cup in. It was hot, sweet with sugar, and generously mixed with evaporated canned milk (courtesy of U.S. land lease).

The next day we boarded a river boat, about 90 or 100 feet long for a 150-mile overnight trip up the river. We disembarked on the southeast side of the river onto a narrow-gauge railroad. We proceeded to Tinsukia, Assam (NE India). There, we halted for about two hours. Local English tea planters had set up outdoor showers. First wash-up in thirteen days! They also served tea and cakes. Another train change and we doubled back northwest to Chabua. This was one of about six major Air Transport Command (U.S.) fields rushed to completion by British/Indian Army Engineer - nothing fancy - just a 5000-foot blacktop runway, with some turn-offs for loading and overnight stays by C-47s and B-24s. There was a base housing and mess facility for transient personnel going to/from Kunming, China from/to India. That area was called the "Polo Grounds" and was notorious for poor food and marginal facilities. This was also the western terminus for all 308th GP operations across the "Hump." This served the purpose of supporting the supply activities of the Group which had been instructed by General "Hap" Arnold (head of the USAAC) to be totally self-sufficient by flying all their required fuel, bombs, ammunition and



other necessities over to China. A rear detachment of about fifty men, mechanics, supply personnel, etc., from all four squadrons not only handled the supply flights, but also did heavy maintenance on all 308th B-24s. The latter included installing replacement engines and turbo-superchargers. This avoided flying these items across the hump when replacement for time, excessive oil consumptions, etc., allowed the plane to fly back to India. This section was housed separately in our own "village" just down the road from the "polo grounds." We had our own mess hall and recreation facilities (the latter some months later).

### Photos of Chabua, India



**Left: Dick Hurd**



**Top right: Orderly room**

**Bottom right: Officers Quarters**





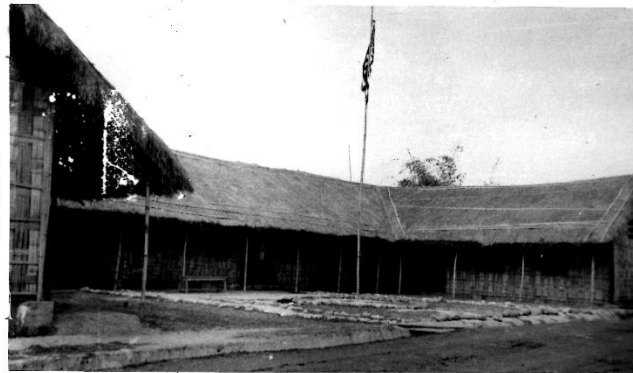
**Jack Hesler**



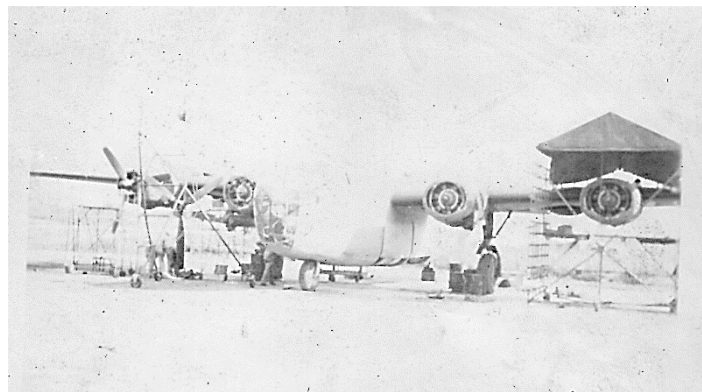
**Bill Halpine**



**Fireplace in Officer's Quarters**



**Polo Grounds**



**Rear echelon maintenance**



I flew to China on one of our 425th planes in March, 1943. Since 1st Lt. Bab Manion was still squadron engineering officer, I as 2nd Lieutenant was the assistant, it was decided after about two weeks that I would be reassigned as acting engineer officer of the rear detachment in Chabua. I flew back and assumed that job. It should be noted that mechanics assigned to the entire group were somewhat older, more mature, with a bent toward machinery and very well trained. They all did outstanding work that made our flights so reliable.

On one occasion, we read that a 7th Bomb Group of the 10th AF in India had changed four engines on a B-24 in two days and got their names in the "CBI Roundup," the theater newspaper. We decided that our guys could do better. We arranged for one of the planes due back for a "time" change of all four engines and superchargers to give us notice ahead of time. We set up four crews, each with a portable hoist, and an engine/nacelle mounting stand to pre-dress a complete engine nacelle with the engine, accessories, etc. They taxied in, cut the engines and the crews went to work. All four engines/nacelles/supercharges were changed, props installed and the engines running in 6 1/2 hours. We got a write-up and a picture in the next "CBI Roundup."

Several notable incidents occurred during the period of six or seven months I spent with this unit. Late in the fall of 1943, General Wedemeyer and Lord Mountbatten, heading up the CBI/Southeast Asia Theater commands decided to try to close Rangoon port to the Japanese. The 308th BG redeployed back to Pandavaswar, India to team up with the 7th BG for a series of daylight raids. Rangoon was a maximum range target and they carried a full load of 500-pound bombs. That put the B-24s well over their normal gross weight. (The design gross

weight designated by Consolidated was 46,000 pounds, the war emergency weight was 54,000 pounds. Our planes normally took off at 65,000 pounds.) For these missions the T.O.G.W. was close to 70,000 pounds. It did not bode well for the campaign when the first plane, (a 7th BG) tried to abort about 3/4 down the runway. He overran, crashed and burned. All the planes taxied to the opposite end of the runway. The second 7th BG plane also tried to abort, overran, crashed and burned. Again, all the rest taxied to the original end, all took off o.k. The raids were only marginally effective because of poor weather over the target. This went on for about ten days. (I often felt that the purpose was more to condition the Rangoon defenses to high altitude bombing as a prelude to the first deployment of the 20th Bomber Command with B-29th which initiated their crews by hitting Rangoon about a year later. The B-29s were later based in northern China for the beginning of the bombing of Japan. Once the Marianas were captured and air bases built, this command was transferred to Saipan as the 20th Air Force.)

Our planes went back to hauling over the Hump and running combat missions. Two other incidents involved the planes. On one day, the planes coming into Chabua were given a weather report of 5,000 feet ceiling; however, a ground fog lay below this which extended down to about 200 feet. That morning, five B-24s crashed trying to get in or ran out of gas. Surprisingly, very few men were lost. Some survived crash landings in the tea "gardens" and others bailed out from 200 feet. Another incident involved a "slow-time" flight (check out and break in one hour flight) of a 374th B.S. plane with a warrant officer as first pilot. He graciously offered to take the ground crew along for a ride. However, he also decided to buzz some local small boats in the Brahmaputra River (about a mile wide). One time he got too low, hit the water and tore out the whole bottom 1/3 of the fuselage from the front of the bomb bay back to the tail. Four ground crew men were lost. He landed at Chabua with no hydraulics, ran off the runway, hit a ditch and broke the back of the plane behind the top turret. Fortunately, the remaining men aboard were not seriously hurt. The plane was junk and we stripped it for spare parts. The pilot was sent back to Langley Field, Virginia, for court martial, where we learned later he instructed B-24 pilots while waiting for trial.

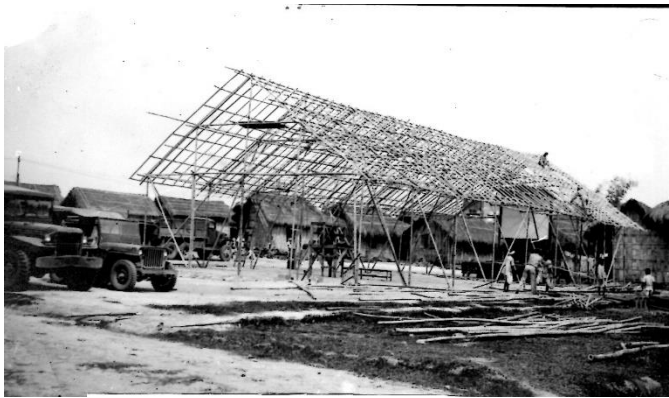
We had some good things happen too. During the dry season, I felt we should fix up a baseball field. We took over a nearby pasture which was pick-marked with deep hoof holes. To fill these in and smooth out the field, we cut the front end off

a bomb trailer, leaving a heavy flat section with U-channels running lengthwise. That was flipped over, turned 90 degrees and dragged repeatedly around the field with a "Cletrac" (a heavy-duty tracked vehicle we used to pull the B-24s). This effectively leveled the field and filled all the holes. We formed a team and challenged other units in the area. Since none of the other men knew how to pitch (or didn't want to, or were deferring to me as the only officer), I got the nod. Unfortunately, the only exhibition game we played was on the Cricket Field of the British Club at Dibrugah in front of club members against the American Aviation Construction Battalion. They clobbered us about 25 to 2. (They were all black.)

Another item worth mentioning was the absence of an adequate movie shelter. Our guys had to ride 6x6s about twenty miles over terrible potholed roads to watch through a picket fence of bamboo roof supports. I decided I could design and construct a bamboo thatch shelter 80 feet long and 40 feet wide with no vertical supports in between. Using my Purdue Civil Engineering course knowledge, I figured out that a truss arrangement spanning the forty feet every ten feet, cross-braced to support the thatch roof, would work. I contacted the local English Army construction officer. He was also convinced it would work. In exchange for a refrigerator, we managed to bring up from Calcutta, he had a crew of wogs prepare the site, construct the trusses, erect the building all using only bamboo poles and strips of bamboo as lashing. The thatching was about six or eight inches deep. (I designed the structure assuming the thatch would be added with time and could soak up to twelve inches of water.) Mosquito netting was put around the inside, and voila! It worked great. We had men from all over the area coming to watch movies supplied by the Group Special Services Office (Mark Conn) who also got the projector for us. Since the local power was variable we had a U.S. Signal Corps generator.



**Photos: Movie Theater designed and constructed by Dick Hurd**



Our own living quarters were bamboo "bashas," simple shelters with bamboo structure, thatched roofs, woven mat sides with openings for windows with shutters hinged at the top, dirt floors and all enclosed with mosquito netting. Four officers in one unit, each with a bunk with a mosquito "bar" (enclosure). Surprisingly, they were on reasonably dry ground, mostly sandy. With the semi-annual weather patterns, they had six months of good (hot, humid and somewhat dry) weather and six months of monsoon drenching (300 inches per year). During the latter, everything was saturated and muddy. Ugh!

Another thing that made life better was to join Lt. Col Avirill, Deputy Group Commander, who flew back from China regularly, for whole basted chicken prepared by a Chinese cook in Dibrugah. Averill was most interesting to talk with as he had many hours of commercial flying plus a tour as a leader of an A-20 (Douglas attack plane) group in North Africa. Lots of tales to tell and he was a great guy.

One other noteworthy event was the only time I accompanied a "slow-time" flight out of Chabua. The weather was exceptional; absolutely clear skies; the visibility was unlimited. The pilot flew northeast up the Brahmaputra River to the point where it broke through the Himalaya Mountains adjoining Tibet through a deep gorge/waterfall between two 21,000 feet snow-capped mountains. It was breathtakingly beautiful. Also, on that flight he decided to check out the power stall characteristics of a B-24. The plane pulled up into about a 45-degree angle (all

the ammunition belts slid out of the waist gun positions into the aft end; we were lucky that none of the control cables got jammed). The stall was very mild; just fell off on the left wing; he dropped it about 2000 feet and then pulled out with no trouble. Never put it past a pilot not to try something to see what will happen!

## CHINA

Soon thereafter, I was rotated back to China when one of the other squadron's assistant engineering officers took over at Chabua. That was in the early fall of 1943. That put me back under Captain Manion again. (By then I was a 1st Lieutenant.) I never had agreed with his methods of handling the men but couldn't say anything. He insisted they all report to the line at 8:00 a.m. and stay there until 5:00 p.m. regardless of the workload or the night time hours getting a mission off. He also had started a practice of rewarding the goof-offs with a promotion if they promised to be good. That resulted in a number of incompetent Master Sergeants as Flight Chiefs or Crew Chiefs while quiet, diligent, good mechanics remained Corporals and buck Sergeants. Every month or so, the then squadron commander would realize the poor management of the engineering section and threaten to do something about the situation. Nothing was done because our squadron lost five consecutive commanders in crashes, lost planes or in one case, a dismissal from his command for screwing up a mission. Finally, we got a commander who survived long enough to see the light and got Manion transferred to the 14th AF HQ (where he was soon promoted to Major). I was designated Engineering Officer and was promoted to Captain. To wipe the slate clean, we had all the engineering people (~150) meet in the mess hall. they were instructed that two policy changes would be put into effect: 1. All men would work the "job" until the planes were ready for combat. When they were finished they were responsible only to the First Sergeant (who reported to the Adjutant in Sqn. Hq.), but were on 15 minutes call 24 hours a day. 2. All rules of the engineering section were posted and would be followed. Exceptions would be disciplined.

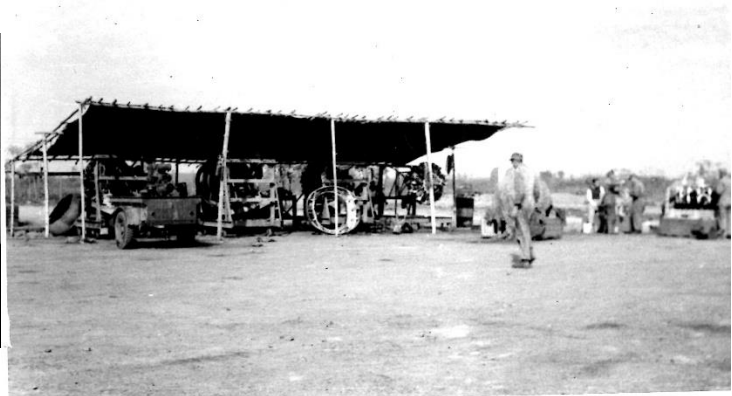
The first part worked out fine. Of course, when some of the guys were in town (Kunming) the 15 minutes wasn't followed in every case; but close enough that all the work got done on time. The second resulted in two master sergeants being busted to corporal and sent back to India for the duration. For instance, one left a wheel assembly out all night. It rained and the brake drum rusted. The rule was for the wheel to be oiled, the problem repaired, and the unit stored in our supply building. A few more changes and we had some of our best men as crew chiefs for the rest of the war. The maintenance record for our squadron was the best in the 308th Group; only 29 turn-backs for mechanical reasons on 3000 combat sorties!

I might insert here that Betty and I exchanged numerous V-mail letters during my period of overseas duty; almost daily when I was stationed at Chabua or Kunming. I also received packages from home (including U.S. toilet paper since the Chinese variety was very coarse and rough). Once, I received some taffy candy packed in with underwear and socks; needless to say, all melted and ran together after a trip in the cargo hold of a slow ship into Calcutta.

The Japanese had airfields at all the major cities, i.e. Hong Kong, Canton, Hankow, Hanoi, Haiphong, as well as on the islands of Formosa and Hainan. Our planes could reach all of these out of the Kunming area (the 425th, our squadron, the 308th BG Hqs., 14th AF Hqs and numerous B-25 and P-40 squadrons and support organizations were at Kunming; the 374th and 375th BS were based at Chengkung and the 373rd BS was at Yangkai, each about 60 miles from Kunming.) The Japanese bombers could hit us from Hanoi/Haiphong and Hongkong/Canton, but didn't have the range from the other fields. Once the B-24s of the 308th started routine bombing missions to strike airfields, railheads, ports, shipping, etc., the Japanese increased their bombing raids on Kunming. The normal procedure prior to a daylight raid was to have all our planes take off to minimize the attractiveness of the target. The priority sequence was transports, B-25s, B-24s and then P-40s. Not only was the relatively primitive early warning "system" employed by our side, many small groups of spotters (Chinese and one or two GIs with radios) quite effective; so was the Japanese intelligence of our deployment. They wanted to destroy the B-24s! If all our planes got in the air prior to their arrival, the Japanese "Bettys" and "Zeros" would circle around about fifty to one hundred miles out and then not come into bomb. Our intelligence was good enough that we knew how many Bettys were warming up prior to take off at Haiphong.

If our B-24s didn't get off or were out of commission for maintenance, they came into to bomb. Primarily, it was a nuisance as it disrupted all activity as everyone hit the slit trenches. After I arrived in Kunming in the early fall of 1943, we had about three or four raids all in daylight. Each time the damage was minimal. However, Chennault felt they were not getting a proper crack at the Japanese planes. He wanted to entice them into a trap. He gave orders that with the next alert the B-24s were to stay on the ground. Just around Christmas they came with 28 Bettys and about 30 Zeros. Since they stayed high, about 25,000 feet, the P-40s normally could barely reach them. So the fighter squadron had stripped down a number of their P-40s (took out armor and several 50 caliber guns) to reduce the weight. They came on in. The P-40s jumped the bombers and one Chinese pilot shot down their lead plane. That disrupted their concentration and formation. Before it was over, they lost 27 Bettys and about five or six fighters. We lost no P-40s. One B-24 took a direct hit on top of the wing and burned up. One 50 kg (about 100 pounds) bomb obliterated the Intelligence Officer's tent. One bomb lay in the open unexploded. When it was deliberately set off, one of the GIs peeked around the corner of a mud brick building and caught a piece of shrapnel across the temple. Hardly a scratch. He was the only member of the 425th ground echelon to receive the Purple Heart for being wounded in combat! After that raid they never came back in the daylight. Sporadic single plane night raids continued until two P-61 Northrop night fighters with radar arrived. After that, they lost every plane sent in. One P-61 also shot down a returning B-24 when it didn't turn on the IFF (Identification, Friend or Foe). All bailed out with no injuries.

### **Photos of Kunming, China**









I should mention that the understanding between the U.S. and Chinese governments was that the latter would supply all food and accommodations for all U.S. military personnel assigned to China. This meant that there was no requirement for the assigned cooks and other enlisted personnel with such duties in our squadrons. They were attached to a unit in India and performed such duties throughout the war while still designated as part of the 308th BG. We did have Mess Sergeants who oversaw the food handling and preparation. Each squadron's Flight Surgeon made sure the food was healthy and safe, in addition to his regular medical duties. Early on, the food was pretty tasteless and boring; all food and



water had to be thoroughly cooked/boiled since the Chinese used "night soil" to fertilize their fields.

The original accommodations for our squadron were long, one-story mud-walled, tile roof, dirt floor barracks. Bunks, 2-tiers high, lined each wall. They were just wood frames with rope mesh supports. The few windows were covered with a kind of ising-glass. Rain dripped through the roof, wind blew through the openings, and large rats were frequent night visitors. We often took time to shoot them using bird shot cartridges issued for jungle survival with a Colt .45 automatic. One amusing incident was when one officer tied a cheese impregnated short rope hanging down under the lower bunk of a fellow prankster. During the night, rats would gnaw on the rope, shaking the "bed." This disturbed his sleep. It took about four or five days before he discovered what was going on.

By the time I arrived back up in China, two new single-story barracks had been built; one for officers and one for enlisted men. Both had wooden floors, plaster over mud-brick walls and tile roofs. Also glass in the windows. Each had a large (40' x 25') day room. Each had large open bathrooms/showers at the other end. The enlisted men had a big open room with single bunks against each wall; arranged head to foot to reduce possibility of passing along colds, etc. However, the officers were given separate rooms off a long central corridor, two to a room. I bunked with Captain George Robinson, the Communications Officer. A nice guy; tough as nails, but soft-spoken and well-mannered. From Powder River, Wyoming, he had worked his way through high school (boarded in Casper) and the University of Wyoming by riding for money in rodeos. He was good at it and made good money. He was about a year older than I. We each had a wood frame rope bunk, an unfinished three-drawer dresser and hangers for clothes. Also room for our foot lockers.

The elevation of Kunming was 6400 feet with clear, dry, sunny days for about half the year and cloudy, moist days (not the excessive rainfall of Assam, India) the rest. Being high, the temperatures could get cool in the winter; however, the latitude was about the same as Key West so it didn't get too cold.

After the air raids stopped, life became rather routine for those in the "ground echelon" of the squadron. As mentioned previously, the 425th lost five commanders. Additionally, there were other losses. Some planes got shot up with

crew casualties (although not like over Germany), a few planes were shot down (however most of the crews bailed out and returned to Kunming with the help of many loyal Chinese.) Some planes ran out of fuel, others crashed into mountains with all aboard killed, others just disappeared (never made it across the hump or never returned from a long-duration sea sweep). Overall, during the period I was there we lost 25 planes, 10 from known enemy action and 15 by operational accidents or unknown causes. The casualties were replaced by new crews flown in by ATC from the states. The planes were replaced by new ones flown in by the Ferry Command. Our Table of Organization was based on a 9-plane squadron. Once in combat, we were assigned 12 planes. At times, we got as low as 5 planes because of attrition; one time after getting a number of new Js to replace the older Ds, we got up to 17. The B-24Ds had no nose turret; the B-24Js had a nose turret plus upgrading of many of the systems such as fuel transfer, turbosupercharger controls, etc. The aircrews rotated back to the states after 400 hours of combat time, which included hump time. (I flew the hump 20 times to and from Kunming.) The planes remained in service for the duration or until superseded by later models.

Toward the end of the war (late 1944 on), our squadrons were assigned twice as many crews as airplanes. Because of the lower damage rate than in Europe, we could turn the planes around to have them ready for the next mission before the crew had enough rest. Needless to say, that kept our mechanics busy all the time. But they did it. We changed engines whenever they reached 400 hours or 3 gallons per hour oil consumption. Superchargers were changed at 400 hours. (As stated earlier, these changes were done in Chabua.) As a matter of interest, we used only new R-1830-43 (or-65) Pratt & Whitney engines built in East Hartford by Pratt & Whitney or in Tonawanda, New York by Chevrolet. The Buick-built engines were not as reliable for some reason. We tried engines overhauled at Agra, India but quickly abandoned that practice as they lasted an average of 45 minutes. The Buicks and overhauls were pushed off on ATC to use in their C-87 (cargo) and C-109 (tankers) versions of the B-24.

The rest of this account is not presented in chronological order. There were a number of situations, incidents and events which were noteworthy, but may be better grouped as 1) interesting/unusual/ out-of-the-ordinary, or 2) close-calls.

## INTERESTING EVENTS:

**A.** Tech. Sgt. Albert Piro was in charge of airplane refueling. that was his nominal assignment. I first encountered Piro while at Wendover, Utah in December 1942. He approached me with a question about what disposition was made of excess empty 100-pound practice bomb casings. I said I didn't know, but to see the Armament Officer. Next thing I heard was that he had shipped a whole bunch of them to his brother in Nutley, New Jersey where they were positioned around the perimeter of the gas station they jointly owned. Through the rest of our U.S. training and the early part of our operations in China, I knew only that he did his job. Then, I heard that there was talk of torch-cutting 6x6 trucks into pieces that could be flown over to China in C-46s and then welded back together to use as refueling vehicles. All this time, gasoline was flown as cargo in 50-gallon steel drums. It was then pumped from each barrel by hand-crank pumps into the B-24s; 2500 to 3500 gallons depending on the mission length. The cut-welded truck arrangement fell through, so Piro contracted the Chinese Nationalist Army and "borrowed" two heavy-duty GMC trucks designed to pull semi-trailers. On each of these he mounted two aluminum 450 gallon B-25 bomb bay tanks. That gave him two 900-gallon tankers which greatly eased the distribution job. He also got gasoline driven pumps. These worked very efficiently until I heard in early 1944 that the Base POL officer was planning to install two 50,000-gallon storage tanks back a short distance into the hills. These were to handle bulk gas flown in by C-109s. It turned out he was looking for a couple of "hardstands" where they could locate underground pipes. We had three or four along one of the taxiways. (Hardstands were just big circular pads covered with crushed rock, but not riveted as were our normal parking/maintenance areas.) Offered two, which he accepted. After these were completed, we could readily taxi each plane to them and refuel by gravity with no drums, no pumps, no trucks. I had the CO authorize me the line chief, Gus Neibuhr, to taxi planes. Thus, Piro was essentially put out of business. Since he was so proficient at scrounging, I arranged with the Sq. Exec. to have him assigned on temporary duty to Calcutta. From then until early 1945, he arranged to have 4000 pounds of stateside food, condiments, spare parts, other goodies, etc. put aboard each B-24 when the crews return to China after a week of R & R (rest and relaxation). Naturally, our mess suddenly was the best in Kunming. Canned

pears, peaches, peas, etc., plus catsup, real salt and pepper, etc. A post-war sequel to all of this is that Betty and I visited Piro in Nutley, New Jersey in 1946.

His gas station business was booming, selling white shirts that were so much in demand then and so hard to acquire. He also helped out at the local boy's baseball clubs who were trying to get re-established after the war. When they couldn't get deliveries on bats, he called the president of Louisville Slugger to line up a whole load and then talked to the head of the N.J. Air National Guard into flying a cargo plane to Louisville on training flight to bring them back to northern Jersey boys. We learned several years later that he died of a massive heart attack.

**B.** I did get several side trips to points of interest during the war. Since the 28th Air Depot, which processed all of our supplies, was in Calcutta, I got down there a number of times. Traveling was only a matter of hitching a ride on a B-24 going on R& R or in an ATC C-47. The only acceptable hotel was the Grand Hotel, an old-style ornate British type. Hardly modern, but lavish and historic. The place to eat was Firpo's Restaurant; very large street-level with openings on three sides. It must have had 200 to 300 tables, each served by a waiter and a busboy. you never saw so many white jackets in one place in your life. Good food, though. I also got to Agra (engine overhauled depot there) and visited the Red Fort and the Taj Majal. historic and beautiful.

**C.** One trip took me down to Bangalore in south central India, (about 150 miles west of Madras). Took a B-24 and crew down to the Hindustan Aircraft Co., operated as an aircraft overhaul facility under a U.S. Air Corps Lt. Col., a recalled airline pilot. he and the technical people there were to try to streamline the gaps around the nose turret on a "J". I was to supervise the running of a series of test to determine if the drag was reduced. Spent the first 2 to 3 days in bed with a terrible cold. Finally, the other guys had me drink a glassful of straight whiskey and put me in bed with piles of comforters on top. The next morning, I was a dehydrated, cured patient. Incidentally, none of the modifications worked. One sidelight of that operation was that we were flying out of a British blacktop strip 5000 feet long at 65,000 pound TOGW. The runway ran uphill about 80 feet in elevation and then dipped down into a valley; then you had to climb out to clear a line of high-tension electric lines on the next hill. Typically, the airspeed would level off at about 90 mph topping the rise, finally climb to 110 mph, our normal lift-off

speed, and then barely clear the wires. After three days of such take-off, the local British commander forbid us to go out at such a heavy GW. Anyway, we did see Madras and much of the lower India cities from 18,000 feet on such flights. Bill Swanson, the pilot of the plane, was later lost on the hump with his whole crew.

**D.** There were several other short trips out of Kunming on troop carrier C-47s. One was to Nanning, about 350 miles southeast. One of our B-24s put into the grass strip P-40 base with a #2 engine shot out (By a B-24 tail gunner ahead of him in formation cleaning his twin 50 cal's prior to going over Hanoi). Because of the communications problems, I accompanied our ground crew. We took a tripod engine hoist, tools, etc., and a replacement engine. Weather was socked in, so the pilot circled for about 45 minutes looking for a hole in the clouds. Suddenly, he flipped it over on the left wing and dove through a small hole into a river valley. Flying about 200 feet under solid clouds with the mountains on each side, he went downriver to a junction pulled a hard acute angle turned up another valley and 10 minutes later, landed at the strip. After everyone and everything was unloaded and I had been assured by my guys they had all the tools parts, and facilities to get the engine changed, I hopped back aboard and we flew back to Kunming.

Another time, we had a plane down about 200 miles west of Kunming at a small strip that had no control tower. Again, it was a C-47 and we dropped off a crew and equipment. That was pretty routine. However, seeing a C-46 glide in with both props feathered was rather unique.. Without a tower for directions, he came in downwind, sailed silently over the strip at about 100 feet and bellied into a rice paddy. All were o.k. except the radio operator broke an arm.

**E.** By this time, the Ferry Command had flown hundreds of C-46s to India and ATC flew in 4000 basic training pilots. Needless to say, the initial familiarization flights were a nightmare. C-46s were all around the field at Chabua with bashed-in noses; braked too fast and flipped up the nose. After three hours of transition training, they were told to climb straight up over the field to 20,000 feet, head east-southeast for 550 miles and land at Kunming. Many of the P-2800 PWA engines quit because the Tech Order said climb with the cowl flaps closed. This overheated the engines and they subsequently failed en route. The crews bailed out. At one time, 131 of the three man crews were walking out of the Burmese Mountains with help of friendly headhunters. They also had numerous nacelle fires from broken

hydraulic lines. These were soon corrected and the hump tonnage went from 5000 tons per month to 40,000 tons. General Tunner, who later ran the Berlin Airlift, headed up the effort.

**F.** In the fall of 1944, two of our squadrons deployed to Luishou, about 350 miles east of Kunming. It had a 10,000 foot crushed rock runway at about 500 feet elevation. That meant TOGW could be raised to carry more fuel. Previously, there had been several very successful raids on Saigon out of Kunming which was maximum range at 65,000 pounds BW. This time, the target was Manila, P.I. However, the local weather turned bad and there was no assurance the planes could get back in safely upon return. Like all other bases in China the only navigational aid available was a radio range, and they were notoriously inconsistent in the mountainous terrain. So everyone sat for two weeks, except one crew. They had repeatedly practiced procedural let-downs even in good weather. To accumulate combat hours toward the magic 400 (and return to the States), they volunteered for sea sweeps to keep check on the Japanese cargo and naval units headed south. (They built up a lot of hours and went back to the States months before any other crew.) All of a sudden, we were all ordered back to our home bases. It seems that General McArthur got wind of the upcoming raid and had it canceled. He didn't want the Japanese in the P.I. on full alert just before they were going to invade Leyte.

**G.** A totally non-significant event was the upgrading of the day rooms in both the officers and enlisted men's barracks. After a stretch of bad weather and resultant inactivity, Robbie (my roommate) and I decided we could brighten them up. He had access to a signal corps 110-volt AC generator. Our engineering section had a bunch of large ganged florescent lights. (They had been issued by some rear echelon "brain" who thought the mechanics could work better at night with these mounted on stands around the airplane. However, none of the mechanics liked them as they ended up working in their own shadows. They much preferred the "drop lights" they were used to.) So anyway, we got a bunch of the guys to paint the interiors, I got the lights mounted on the ceilings, and Robbie wired it all up. Using a 24V aircraft battery, he could drive the generator as motor to get the engine started and then switch it over. When we got all finished, you could start it up remotely from switches/solenoids from under the officer's bar and both day rooms would light up. In case of an air raid, the engine could be ground out/shut down



by switches under the bar in either barracks. Worked great! I also cleaned up a bunch of hydraulic lines and oxygen tanks and using CO2 fire extinguishers had carbonated water on tap at the bar. The local ATC and SOS guys couldn't get over it.

H. There were several incidents concerning the planes. One time, when Gus Niebuher (425th Line Chief) was taxiing a B-24 belonging to another squadron, he encountered a soft section of the taxiway. The right wheel dug in and the plane pivoted 270o (no nose-wheel steering, you steered with differential engine power and brakes.) It just happened so fast that before he could control it, the nose wheel crossed the deep rut and broke off! Needless to say, he was afraid of getting court martialled. However, we didn't tell anyone and all the ground crew guys worked around the clock to get it repaired. It happened that another B-24 had problems and was being stripped out on the field. They unriveted the entire nose sections of both planes, transferred the undamaged one and riveted it all in place. All wires and lines were hooked up. The plane checked out and I called the other squadron to ask how come they hadn't flown their plane back to their field. They sent a flight crew. No one ever knew the difference. It took three days and nights.

I. Another time, as the planes were all taxiing out to take off on a mission, one blew a nose tire. The crew was going to get out of the mission, but I told the operations officer we'd have it flight-ready in five minutes. The crew and several crew chiefs all got in the far aft; this tilted the front end up. The tire and wheel assembly were pulled off and new one installed. The crew got back in place, fired up the engines and caught up to the formation. J. A really odd incident occurred the time three B-24s were to fly loads of frag bombs for the fighters and B-25s further east. The Ordnance people loaded the boxes according to my instructions; strung out along the catwalk from the "put-put" and then the rest back near the waist windows. This was to distribute the weight to keep the center of gravity ("CG") in the proper position for stable flight. However, one pilot took a look and had his crew move them all back to the waist area (he was supposed to check the CG, but obviously didn't). As he taxied out, I noticed the tail skid was dragging, a sure sign the CG was too far aft. I got to the Operations Officer just as the pilot started his take-off run so he said, "Don't worry about it. He's getting off o.k." And he did. Climbed out of sight to the east. About ten minutes later, back they came. Landed and taxied to their revetment. The whole bunch jumped out, kissed the

grounds and told us what happened. At about 12,000 feet, just over the "Rest Camp" lake, they hit a little scud (thin flat clouds), the plane shuttered and then stalled, flipped over on one wing and headed straight down at the lake (elevation 7,000 feet). In a split second the radio operator jumped out, popped his chute and landed unhurt in the lake (a local Chinese fisherman got him out and took him to the Rest Camp.) The pilot managed to pull the plane out of the dive, leveled off, and had the crew throw out all the load, plus anything else they could. Of course, that correct the CG problem. Our mechanics and sheet metal men inspected the plane thoroughly, but found nothing wrong. Ordnance loaded new boxes of frags, operations got another crew, and they got the stuff to the units out east without further problem. Tough planes.

K. That was also demonstrated when a pilot landed a Kweilin (also about 300 miles east) after taking a 20mm explosive shell in the front main spar between the number 3 and number 4 engines, making a hole about a foot in diameter. A Consolidated tech rep (civilian) said it was o.k. to fly back to Kunming as long as the load was light. The pilot said, "Ok, you go with us." As they came back to base, the pilot asked the rep if these B-24s were really tough. He said sure. So, the pilot buzzed the field, cranked it up and around for a fighter-type landing. The rep about passed out. The plane was repaired and flew the rest of the war.

L. The 308th participated in many notable missions: low-level skip-bombed ships in Saigon Harbor in broad daylight; laid mines to block the entrance to Hong Kong Harbor from 100 feet by moonlight; six planes with three 700-pound delayed mines each (furnished, fused, loaded, and armed by U.S. Navy people who accompanied each plane.) Naval intelligence was so good that one time they set the fuses to go off under the fifth large steel vessel of a major convoy which had to enter the harbor single file. It blew up and sank the one that carried a year's supply of aircraft parts of the planes in the HongKong/Canton area. The Japanese started diving to recover them, but gave up when B-25s and B-24s, returning from sea sweeps with unused bombs, hit them almost every day and night with 500-pounders. Later in the war, the sea sweeps involved 13-hour missions, singly, down to Saigon in Vietnam, over to Lingayen Gulf on Luzon Island, P.I., up to Formosa (now Taiwan) and back to Kweilin. The U.S. Navy wanted reports on all merchant and warship movements prior to their invasions. Also during this period, we started to get LAB-equipped planes. (low altitude bombing using airborne radar). The

crews were specially trained at Langley Field, Virginia. They were good! These planes bombed everything inside a 200-mile line offshore and the subs took care of everything further out. Since our planes bombed at night from 400 feet on autopilot, they couldn't differentiate the targets, so the subs stayed offshore to charge their batteries on the surface without concern.

M. One noteworthy mission was a single-plane effort. Again, the U.S. Navy called the shots. It seems the Italians scuttled a 30,000-ton passenger ship in the Yangtze River early in the war when they weren't sure who was on which side. The Japanese undertook to raise and refurbish it as a troop ship. Lt. Col Hapson, deputy group commander, piloted one of our 425th planes with a crack crew. They flew to Kweilin for overnight and then on east another 500 miles to a small grass strip sometimes used for P-40s. Drums of fuel were flown in by C-47s and the B-24 refueled by hand pumps. The next day they took off mid-day to arrive at a point south of the river at 5:30 p.m. They came in at 150 feet out of the sun, up a small rise, and there was the ship being towed just as the Navy said it would. They bombed visually and put three 500 pounders into the side. It rolled over and sank immediately. Surprise was the key, and they achieved it. No AA guns shot and none of the 200 Japanese fighter planes in the area

N. Normally, I did not get involved with the mission details. The Operations Officer would notify us of the number of planes and the fuel load. The Armament office was told what bomb was needed: type, size and number. The Ordnance officer procured the bombs and his guys delivered them to the airplanes. The armament people attached the bomb shackles (release mechanism), raised them into the bomb bays, hooked up the electrical lines to the shackles and installed the fuses in the nose of each bomb (each fuse had a safety pin which was pulled out by a flight crew member prior to nearing the target; the fuses had a small propeller which rotated on release and activated the fuse well clear of the airplane.) All of the above is for general background information. The one time I did involve myself was when we got word to put in 2500 gallons. The bomb load was 250-pounders. During the night the armament crews switched these to 500-pounders. I became concerned and asked the operations officer what was up. He demurred, but I persisted. He finally said the target had been changed to Hankow. That was the kind of thing I was afraid of. The 500 -pounders meant a heavy strike and all such targets were well out of range. I told him that they had never hit Hankow and returned to

Kunming on 2500 gallons. After some discussion, he contacted the C.O.; the latter listened carefully. He said "Group" had specified the fuel load. He then asked what I thought should be done. I said to fill the wing tip tanks to bring it up to 2750 gallons. He asked about the gross weight. I told him that was within the 65,000 pounds TOGW that was standard for the Kunming conditions. He said, "Okay." We topped them off. Early the next morning, nine planes all took off okay. Late in the day, they trickled back in. Two of them ran out of gas on one of the engines while taxiing back in. All the rest, except one, were back o.k. , but into the last 200 gallons. However, one had landed at a 1500-foot grass strip at 7500 feet elevation, built for L-5 puddle-jumpers, when he got too low on gas to get into Kunming. The next day, an experienced pilot volunteered to fly it out. Our crew leveled out the four main tanks with 400 gallons and they and the three crew members off-loaded all excess weight (unused ammunition, took out the waist guns, etc.) He set full power (60"Hg) with the brakes on, 2- degree flaps (normal) and lifted that son-of-a-gun out of there with inches to spare. Without that extra 250 gallons we might have lost 6 or 7 of those 9 planes.

I think these are enough examples to give one a feel for the type of missions flown and the courage and competence of the crews.

## **CLOSE CALLS**

God must have been looking over me as there were a number of times my number could have come up, but didn't:

- A.** On one of the trips to Calcutta, I was given a return flight schedule on a C-47 out of Dum Dum Airport at 6:00 a.m. going to Chabua. The prior evening they called me at the Grand Hotel to say I'd been bumped in favor of a bird colonel, so be at the airport for a 7:30 flight. When I arrived, I found out the first plane had crashed on take - off (too much luggage in the aft and CG adversely affected) and all on board were killed. Luck? Good fortune?

- B.** On a flight from Kunming to Chabua we gave another bird colonel a ride. He was in a hurry to catch a plane into SE Asia Hqs, so the pilot flew as fast as the max cruise setting of the engines would allow and then started an early let down as soon as the navigator said we could clear the final range of mountains. It was all solid clouds. All of a sudden a bunch of pine trees passed the left wing. he gave full power and climbed until he was sure we were clear and then let down into Chabua the normal procedure. In retrospect, it turned out the area charts had been copied from old British maps for which they eyeballed the height at 6900 feet; later we checked it on a clear day and the ridge went up to 9000 feet. We had flown through a narrow gap!
- C.** One of the Flight Leaders was a cocky little guy who swore one could fly the hump at 13500 feet if you kept south over the Japanese held area. (The C-46s always flew further north at 20,000 feet to avoid Japanese fighters at Myityina, whereas the B-24s flew in three-plane formations in clear weather and the Japanese avoided confrontation with thirty 50-caliber guns.) Anyway, on a socked-in day he decided to prove the point. I had to get back to Kunming so I went along. Everything was fine, other than the navigator chewing his nails, until we broke out into the clear right over a beautiful blue round lake. When the navigator got his bearings, he informed us there must have been a strong south wind as we were 10 miles north of his projected course and had flown on instruments between two 15,000 foot mountains just west of the lake!
- D.** A close call also occurred at Chabua. A newly-arrived colonel from a B-25 group in North Africa took over as 308th Group Commander. He was such a know-it-all that he informed his staff he was a command pilot, a rated navigator, a rated bombardier, and didn't want anyone telling him anything. Again, I happened to be in Chabua on a trip and needed to get back to Kunming. The B-24 he was flying was the only one headed that way. It was at the usual full TOGW at 65,000 pounds. He didn't get started down the runway straight and used brakes to try to get lined up (a cardinal error). By the time he got straight and at full power, we were a third of the way down the runway. I was at the right rear window as this was the safest place to be in case of a crash. All of a sudden, I saw a painted C-46, parked on the side, come into view. That was way down the runway! The main wheel struts were not extended which meant the wing was not lifting significantly. Suddenly, he horsed back on the control yoke, the struts extended briefly, and the plane dropped back down.

One last bounce and we were airborne, barely. Fortunately, several months earlier I had pressured the British RR guys to split the freight trains on the track across the end of the runway. We cleared the tracks by 4 to 5 feet, clipped through some tea plants and then some low shade trees, and staggered into the air. His obstinate pride (not stopping and going back for a second run) almost killed all of us. Our 425th flight surgeon was also aboard and had taken the jump seat between the pilot and copilot. He later said the colonel had suddenly turned absolutely white and beads of sweat had jumped out on his skin. He had witnessed this man realizing he was going to die. I never flew with him again. You could have court martialed me first.

- E. Another close call occurred in China. We were very short of planes and Gp. Hq. told another squadron to turn over one of their ships to us. Surprisingly, it was almost brand new. We smelled a rat. Gus Niebuher and his crew chiefs went over the A-1 (record of all flights). Sure enough, they had trouble. Twice the number 3 engine had run away (oversped when the prop went to flat pitch) and couldn't be feathered. Our guys checked everything and gave it a thorough ground check. On the next mission the number 3 engine ran away at high altitude, they couldn't feather it and so salvoed the bombs, burned off fuel and came back to Kunming okay. We changed everything in the whole system. New engine, new prop, new electrical-driven hydraulic feathering pump, wiring, feathering switch in the cockpit, and a raft of other things. We ground ran it; all checked out okay. Before the next mission, the weather over the potential targets turned bad so we had a couple of extra days. The operations officer suggested a check flight on the plane. I agreed. He got a seasoned pilot, copilot, and radio operator. I went along as a flight engineer. Since the plane was loaded and fueled for a mission, we left it that way except to remove the fuses from the 500-pound bombs. On take-off, everything looked good until we were 5 feet off the ground. The number 3 engine ran away. The copilot, Arne Oas, was in the left seat and the pilot (not of the same crew) was in the right seat. While Arne, (a stoic, unflappable Swede), masterfully handled the controls, the "copilot" and I cut the number 3 engine's fuel, hit the feathering switch (no result), and tried to correct the situation. This took only seconds but seemed like several minutes. Arne got up to about 25 feet, the gear tucked up, the flaps still at 20 degrees, and full power on the other three engines (with turbo superchargers giving "War Emergency" pressure of 60" of Hq.) I asked



Arne if we should salvo the bombs before we got to a line of trees along a dike in the rice paddy. He said, "No, I think we can make it." He was concerned that opening the bomb bay doors would add too much drag. We clipped through the top of 30-foot trees and headed down across Kunming Lake, about 30 miles long. he finally had us salvo the bombs in the south end of the lake. We had 500 feet by then. He swung back to the field. On the downwind leg he asked for "wheels down". The increased drag (in addition to the windmilling prop) caused us to gradually lose a little altitude. On crosswind he called for "half flaps". Again, the drag was higher. He swung into final, lined up to the runway and said, "No flaps 'til I tell you." We headed directly at a small Chinese village made of mud bricks on our glide path; the three good engines still at full power. Just as it looked like we'd pile into the village he yelled, "Full flaps!" We ballooned upward and then dropped right on the turn-around pad at the end of the runway.

- F.** The sequel to this is that again changed the engine, pumps, switches, etc., for a total of 21 items. Took off, climbed out,, got on course in formation and the number 3 prop ran away. There was a solid undercast so the crew all bailed out and hiked back. I was always glad that the plane never injured or killed anyone, particularly me.
- G.** Sometime about late 1944 or early 1945, the 425th squadron commander (a Lieutenant Colonel) asked if we had a B-24 he could fly down to Chengkung to check something with the COs of the 374th and the 375th squadrons based there. Then he asked me to go along as copilot and flight engineer; he'd handle the radio and navigation. Off we went, just the two of us. Landing was difficult as it was raining in torrents. I looked out the side window of the cockpit and called out height above the ground. He lined up with the runway. Landed o.k, but somewhat hairy (for me, at least). The weather cleared somewhat for take off to return to Kunming. He wheeled out, lined up, didn't check the magneto drop on any of the engines, and pushed the throttles full forward. About 100 feet down the runway, I reached up and pulled them all to "idle," pointed to the lack of boost pressure (the turbo superchargers had not been set; the elevation of that field was almost 7000 feet). He never said a word, applied the brakes, turned around and taxied back and lined up again. We checked the magneto drop, set the mixture ratio to auto rich, set the supercharges to the usual 54" and took off with no problem. I never mentioned the incident

afterwards and neither did he. (I ran across his name later as being a BG in charge of all the troop carrier operations in Korea.)

H. I went on one combat bombing mission to see what it was like, and to give me more rapport with the air crews. The CO said o.k. as long as it was a "milk-run" (no expected Japanese opposition). After discussions with the Operations Officer we decided on an upcoming full group daylight raid on some undefended target. As usual a full load, 16- 250-pound bombs and 2500 gals of gas. The night before, we got word to add 250 gallons to each plane, fill the wing tip tanks and ordinance changed to six 500-pound bombs. Being the suspicious type, I tracked down the Operations Officer. Sure enough, they had changed the target to Changsha, a major railhead for the Japanese in central China. The defenses were lot of ack-ack and 50 to 100 Zeros. He said I had committed to go, so I'd better not back out. So I went. The 11th man with no station, no responsibilities. The flight out was impressive for me, 24 B-24s with us in the lead of our squadron on the right side of the lead squadron. I spent most of that time on the flight deck with the pilot and copilot, or down with the navigator (also the bombardier's location ) in the nose. All the rest of the crew were in the four gun turrets: nose, top, tail, and bottom, or at each waist window gun. Cruise was at 18,000 feet. Weather was 10% clouds under us. Hit the IP (Initial Point) and turned toward the target. Someone came on the intercom ( I was plugged in with earphone). "Bandits - 10 o'clock high!" More comments on incoming Zeros. I tried to help spot but couldn't see out very well. I was on the flight deck on the jump seat. Zeros slipped through the formation at amazingly closing speed, just blurs as they flashed through. Ack-ack started but was ineffective. Prior to the bomb drop point the bombardier shouted, "All my bombs are gone!" I checked the bomb bay and they were all gone all right (the doors had previously been opened). The rest of the group dropped on target. (Later photos showed good coverage with major damage to the railyard. Combat photos also showed a big burst in the river about 1/2 mile from the target.) The group headed for home. The co-pilot of our left wing ship had taken a 20mm cannon shell in the chest and was dead. Several ships in the three other squadrons took major hits; they made emergency landings at alternate fields about half-way back to Kunming. Our plane had been hit by two 50 cal shells. One left only skin holes in and out. The second had crossed under the flight deck, hit, and cut the bomb release cables running

from the Norden bombsight to the bomb bay release unit (which salvoed the bombs) and nicked a hydraulic line running to the nose wheel retraction mechanism. The flight engineer and I assessed the damage. Since the B-24 had a reserve hydraulic tank and the line gash was small, we felt we could handle it o.k. I got him to have the rest of the crew chew gum (which they all had). We used the plasticized gum to block the hole and then wrapped it with friction tape. Just before landing we opened the line to the emergency hydraulic tank. We cranked the landing gear down by hand cranks/cables to conserve hydraulic fluid. The flaps deployed o.k. and the brakes worked fine. No sweat!

### Photos of Kunming, China

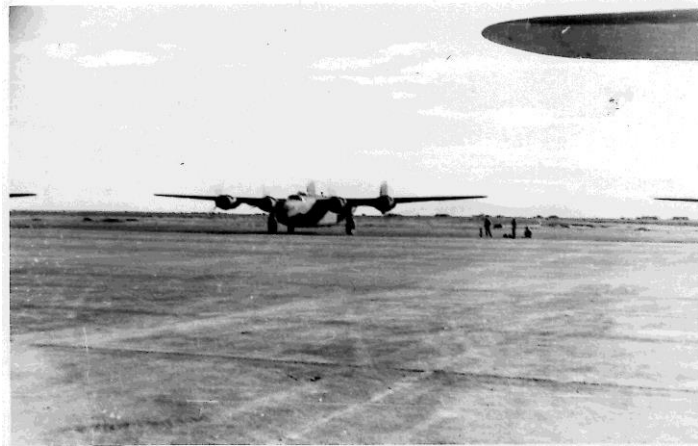


**Hike up Old Baldy with Jerry Farmer and Robbie (George) Robinson**

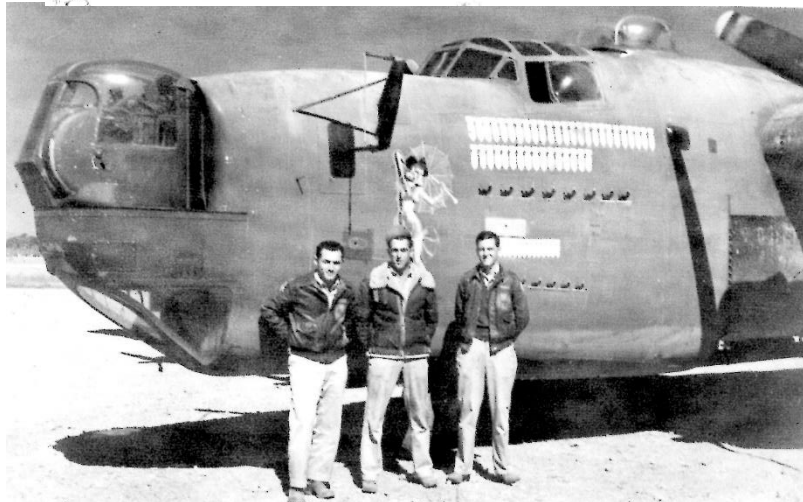


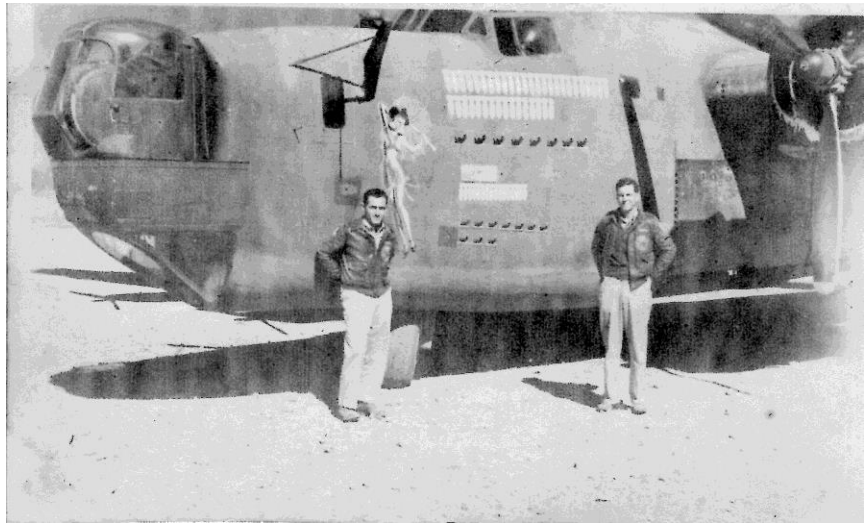












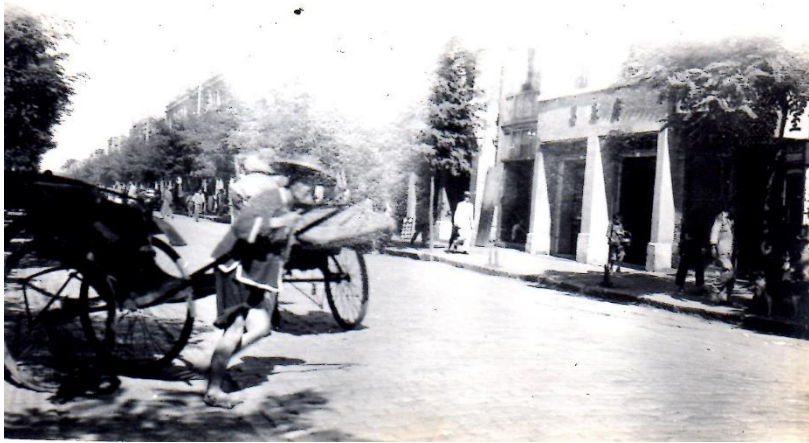














**Photo: R & R Camp**





**Photo: January 1945**

**Back Row:** Lt. Mitchell, former mess officer, Capt. Flank, Sq. surgeon; Lt. Baker, Sq. Bombardier; Lt. Berman, mess off.

**Second Row:** Capt. Asp, adjutant; Capt. Robinson, Communications off; Capt. Wabl -Aarmament & Ordnance Off; Capt. Hurd – Engineering Officer; Lt. Horton – Radar Off; Capt. McLeon – Intelligence Officer; Lt. Beiz – Flight leader; Lt. Brucker – Asst. Intell. Off; Lt. Farmer – Asst. Engr. Off; Lt. Pratt – Asst Comm. Off.

**Front Row:** Lt. Cross – Bombsight Off; Capt. Hessian – Ass't Itell. Off. Lt. Meyers – Gunnery Off; Maj Marshall – Sqn C.O.; Capt. Cunningham – Sqn. Navigator; Maj O'Donnell – Executive Off; Capt. LeVan – Operations Officer; Capt. McCallum – Asst. Oper. Off; Lt. McClure – Flight Leade

## THE LIGHTER SIDE

Even with a war going on there were still opportunities to relax at times and see some sights. Several times, several of us took a jeep for a local sightseeing jaunt. The favorite diversion was the drive up the mountain on the west side of Kunming Lake to a Buddhist Temple. We always picked clear, dry days with unlimited visibility. The view was spectacular from a lookout 2000 feet above the valley. The temple was carved into solid rock, gaily painted with guardian lions and fierce grotesque warrior to ward off the evil spirits. Banners waved in the breeze and prayer slips of brightly-colored paper were all about.

Of course, a number of times we went into Kunming proper for dinner. Kunming was about six miles from the airport. Before the Japanese invasion, it had about 70,000 people. When we were there, it was about 700,000. There were only a few restaurants we would patronize. Several catered to American tastes with steaks, roast beef, etc. A very few Chinese restaurants served legitimate Cantonese or other provincial food that were lean enough and sanitary enough that the risks were low of getting sick. One time Robbie and two other officers and I had dinner with some hot rice wine, in town. Robbie and one of the others must have shared something more potent. They got drunk. I shepherded one of them back to the base by commandeering a pony cart (local taxi) to turn around and take us. The driver's young daughter jumped out with fear. Anyway, I got him back to the barracks, threw him in the shower and with others helping, got him into bed. Robbie and his escort didn't show up for several more hours. Robbie was about 6'2", 200 pounds and all muscle, having been a cowboy all his life. He got obsessed with the idea that the local Chinese had enticed me or abducted me into the dens of iniquity. As my protector, he had to find me and save me. He roamed the back streets of Kunming grabbing an unsuspecting Chink, tried to question him in English, getting only shrugs, vague waving of arms, or gibberish, so Robbie would give a round-house punch and push him in the gutter. Other times, he invaded the brothels, created havoc and consternations, but would finally give up in disgust. About 2:00 a.m., he sobered up and tired out enough for the other fellow to get him back to the base. Naturally, they suffered from excruciating hangovers the next day. At least he was trying to look out for me.

We did have a number of USO shows visiting Kunming. Probably the most appreciated was Jinx Faulkenberg. She couldn't sing, dance, or tell jokes, etc. but she sure looked good. She was also a real trooper. She went by small plane to all the outlying, backwater areas, sometimes with only two or three Americans there. On the other hand, Paulette Goddard was too prissy to even leave Calcutta. The "CBI Roundup" really panned her. Another dud was Ben Blue. His language and jokes were so filthy that a hanger full of GIs booed him.

I never did go to any social affairs. That was for the 14th AF Hq guys and "fly boys." They danced with some of the nurses and Red Cross girls. I never even saw any of them. A major form of entertainment for many of the officers were poker games. I watched and learned; mainly that the players who rotated into two seats contributed all the money for the five regulars. The Armament Officer was a former nationally-rated bridge player (with his mother). I figured he sent home about \$700 per month in winnings. Another gambling opportunity was once a month (just after payday). Five sergeants, including the first sergeant, formed a syndicate to hold a Las Vegas type gambling hall in the enlisted men's day room. Of course, no roulette, just card games and dice. The "House" take was the same as they experienced at Ely and Elko, Nevada, while we were at Wendover. Each of them made so much money and were reluctant to send money orders back to the states because of tax vulnerability. They signed up for 30-day leave in the USA after 18 months overseas in exchange for committing to another year in China. Reportedly, each took \$60,000 home in money belts. Of course, such gambling brought heartache to some. One of our mechanics got orders to go home when he reached his 42nd birthday (a policy). He withdrew \$3,000 savings from the adjutant's safe (an old army tradition) and lost it all in one night just before he flew home. Sad, but nothing we could do. I won \$80 one night in a dice game, sent it home to my dad to go toward an engagement ring for Betty. She got it in Chicago on a visit to my folks. She always was a favorite of his. I never gambled again. I'm still ahead \$80.

In the middle of the summer of 1944 orders showed up sending me to Rest Camp. The weather was beautiful. The camp was all new with comfortable wooden buildings. We swam, played basketball, volleyball, etc. and ate wonderful meals prepared by American cooks from stateside food. It was a welcome break and the only leave I took until the end of my service.



One other diversion was basketball. It was very popular throughout China. The U.S. Marines and the YMCA had introduced it after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. One big advantage was that it required a lot less area than baseball, football, cricket, rugby and other such games. Also, less equipment. Mark Conn (former welterweight boxing champion and referee) was the Group Special Services Officer. He organized a basketball team from the 308 Hq. and the 425th Sq. We challenged other teams from the area, such as ATC, SOS (Service of Supply), the various other headquarters companies, communications sections and other of about 4000 or so troops in the Kunming area. We beat them all, sometimes by lopsided scores. Then we ran up against a team from the Chinese 8th Route Army. We played in the courtyard of the YMCA in Kunming. Had a good crowd, too. They had one little guy who could hit a two-hand set shot from mid-court about 80% of the time (or at least it seemed that way.) We were walloped! (I ran into Mark Conn at South Florida reunion several years ago. )

### **FINAL MONTHS OVERSEAS**

About February of 1945, the entire group was transferred to Chendu in northwest China, about 400 miles almost north of Kunming. We occupied bases built for the 20th Bomber Command and their B-29s. They pulled out in early 1945 and flew out of the Marianas (Saipan and Tinian) after they were captured. (Incidentally, our mechanics had to repair a number of B-29s when they limped into Kunming, usually burned out exhaust manifolds or failure of one of the R-3350 Wright engines. ) Things were pretty quiet after that. Some missions against rail bridges across the Yellow river and hitting railroad yards. Unfortunately, our then Sq. C.O. was killed by a single rifle bullet in the head while on a low level strafing run on the way home from a bombing mission. He was a nice guy, well-liked, but had no fear at all. Jerry Farmer had joined our squadron in late 1944 as Assistant Engineering Officer as my designated replacement if I got "rotated" back to the states at the end of the two-year overseas schedule. He came from Brooklyn and worked his way through Brooklyn Polytech at nights. We hit it off well and I took very good care of him, because if anything happened to him, I didn't go home.

They did rotate the Squadron Executive Officer, which left a vacancy. I was made Acting Executive Officer. It was nowhere near as interesting as being on the line with the airplanes. Got only into Chendu once. I visited a bazaar and bought Betty a lacy silver bracelet (she still has it.)

Finally, my orders came through. Proceed to Ft. Totten, New York via ATC. Flew to Kunming in a C-47; on over the hump in a C-46 to Chabua; at 20,000 feet with no oxygen. The crew issued army blankets to each of the 20 men aboard and told us to lie down on the floor and sleep. Several days there and then on to Karachi via New Delhi. Backlogged there, so remained several days.

The next leg was to Cairo, Egypt. We landed at Abadan, Iran for fuel; Habbinya, Iran for oil for one of the R-2800 engines on the C-46. Landed in Cairo about 6:00 a.m., beat and tired. Looked forward to a shower and the sack. However, after a shower at the BOQ, several of us realized it might be the only time in our lives we would be there. So we caught a taxi and toured the pyramids and the sphinx.



Then on into the city. Looked for a place with a belly dancer. No luck so early in the day. Had lunch on the front porch of the famous and notorious Shepard's Hotel (since burned down during riots). Wandered around a little more and back to the field to catch a 6:00 p.m. C-46 to Casablanca, Morocco. Refueled in Tripoli, Libya. There had been a large backlog of returning GIs just before I arrived. This was the latter part of April, 1945. They brought in an aircraft carrier and took 3000 out. I had to wait four days but never got into town as they had a very short notice on

who caught the next plane and if you missed it, you went to the end of the list. Finally, I boarded a four-engine (PWA R-2000s) C-54. Refueled in the Azores and Gander, Newfoundland. Arrived LaGuardia, New York City at 11:45 Saturday night, April 28, 1945.

It was a great time for my parents as Don was liberated from a prisoner of war camp in Germany on April 29, 1945. They took us to Ft. Totten (also on Long Island) for overnight. The next morning they processed us to go on leave. I requested Arlington, Virginia, where Betty was with her folks. They cut orders send me to Ft. Meade, MD. I mentioned to the desk sergeant that I would have to get off the train in Maryland to get new to get on the train to go on down to Washington. He also thought that was unnecessary and immediately changed the orders to send me to Washington. The first time I had an opportunity to let anyone know I was back in the States was at the New York/Penn Station. I called the Willinghams in Arlington, Virginia, talked to Mom W., who got the message to Betty who was playing tennis with Australian servicemen. They agreed to meet me at Penn Station at 4:00 p.m. I hustled to the train.

## HOME COMING

Betty and her folks met me right on time. Pop W. asked what I would really like after two years out of the country. I said a "chocolate malted milk shake". We stopped at a drug store and while in there an unknown (to me) man approached and said, "You must be Dick. I'm playing the organ at your wedding on Thursday." That was the first I knew of the date. When my folks came in from Chicago and cousin Lydiana from New Jersey for the wedding at the Fort Myers Chapel on May 3, my homecoming was complete. I'll finish this section with a quick summary:

- Betty and I honeymooned for a week in Boyce, Virginia.
- Took the train to Chicago for a brief stay with Mother and Dad.
- They accompanied us to Elwood, Indiana where all the mid-western aunts, uncles, cousins, paternal grandmother and grandfather, et. al., feted us with a big dinner in the basement of the Elwood Lutheran Church.
- Betty and I continued on to Miami Beach redistribution center, as my 21-day "delay en route" ran out.



-Spent 30 days in the sun and surf as guests of the U.S. Army Air Corps, with a suite in the Caribbean Hotel and lavish meals at the Cadillac Hotel. I was the first ground officer to return with a MOS for engineering officer. They couldn't figure out where to station me.

-They sent me to the Pentagon on 10-day temporary duty in an armament job; Not to my liking; nor the supervisor, so let the orders stand and went on up to the Atlantic City redistribution center. While at the Pentagon, I met a very likeable bird colonel who would try to get me assigned to the

Engineering Division at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. Unfortunately, a similar request came in from Patterson Field (also Dayton) in the Maintenance Division.

-Got sent to Patterson after a week in Atlantic City. The assignment was a make-work thing, so it was completely boring. One of the good things was the Air Corps sent Betty and me to Indianapolis where I attended a 2-week "Jet Familiarization" course at Allison. They had started to build I-40 jet engines (British design) under license from G.E. Another benefit: Betty and I met a number of good friends while in Troy (where we lived) and Dayton.

-With the points I had accumulated, I became eligible to separate from the service in October 1945. I had previously made up my mind not to make a career of the military as I felt a ground officer would never get the consideration for good assignments that flight officers would. The order came only 5 days before a new semester started at Purdue (on wartime accelerated schedule), so Betty and I moved to West Lafayette where I enrolled to get the eight additional credits to get a BSME degree. My terminal leave ran through until December 24. I was officially out of the service but remained on call as a Reserve Officer. Other than several years in the Connecticut Air National Guard in the late 1940s, that was the end of my military career.

## EPILOGUE

It is worth emphasizing that I present only my personal experiences, impressions and contacts. Service in such a time period was exciting, educational, and an opportunity to visit unusual places in the world. I also circled the globe by sea and air.

However, war is something you're glad you experienced and survived, but would never want to do it again, nor wish on any else. War is brutal, unforgiving and represents a failure of mankind to live in harmony and freedom. I did not relate such incidents as one of our B-24s crashing on take-off at Kunming, killing 9 of the 10 men on board, or seeing an F-5 (P-38 photo reconnaissance plane) come into Kunming after a 13-hour flight to Japan, lose an engine just before touch-down, drop a wing and cartwheel in a burst of flame and then watch the pilot burn to death while we watched unable to help. War desensitized people to death and destruction! We admire courage and worship the heroes who emerge from war, but we must not underrate the sacrifices of those GI in the infantry who endured terrible conditions and pervasive fear and too often lost their lives.

"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." - B. Franklin

"The price of peace is steadfast preparedness." - Richard C. Hurd

#### CLOSING THOUGHTS

I was lucky, as was Don, to come out of my wartime experiences sound of mind and body. There were also many prayers on my behalf. God must have been watching over me.

#### IV. SOURCES

-My memory, for 95% of it;

-Telephone call to Arne Oas, Minden, Nevada, 1995

"Glines, Carroll V. " Chenault's Forgotten Heroes - The Saga of the 308th Bomb Group in China," Atglen, PA 19319: Shiffer Publishing, Ltd. 1995.

-"Jing-Bao Journal," bi-monthly publication of the 14th AF Association

-Foster, John T. "China-Up and Down." Rutland, Vermont: Academy Books. 1994.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AA, ack-ack	Anti-aircraft fire
BOQ	Bachelor officer quarters
CO	Commanding Officer
Bird Colonel	Full Colonel, with eagles for insignia
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority (predecessor to FAA)
CBI Joe Stillwell	China-Burma-India Theater, commanded by General (Vinegar)
CG	Center of Gravity
G, Grp., Gp.	Group, consisting of four squadrons
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
(H)	Heavy (B-17s and B-24s)
HQ	Headquarters
"Hump"	Eastern end of the Himalaya Mountains
Sgt.	Sergeant
gal.	gallon
T.O.G.W./GW	Take Off Gross Weight/Gross Weight
mph	miles per hour
P.I.	Philippine Islands

B-24                    Large, heavy bomber with four Pratt & Whitney Aircraft R-1830, 1200 horsepower engines; Counterpart of the better-known B-17, but had longer range, four bomb bays instead of two, and could carry a heavier bomb load. A disadvantage was they flew at about 20,000 to 25,000 feet instead of 30,000 feet (better for the B-17 in Europe where the anti-aircraft guns were more accurate).

B-25                    twin-engine medium bomber

P-40                    Pre-war fighter with single Allison liquid-cooled engine.

P-51                    Mid-war fighter with single Rolls Royce, liquid-cooled engine; Advantage: much faster, higher altitude and very long range.

P-61                    Quite a large night fighter with two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines; had radar and 6 forward-firing 20mm cannons;

C-47                    Pre-war cargo plane with two Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engines; could carry 28 passengers;

C-46                    Mid-war cargo plane with two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines; could carry about 40+ passengers; also fly much higher and faster with much more load;

Bettys                  USAAC term for a particular Japanese twin-engine bomber; I used the term for all such aircraft

POL                    Petroleum Officer

Tech rep.              Technical representative

Zeros                   USAAC term for a particular Japanese single-engine fighter; I used the term for all such aircraft (some Japanese planes in China were Zekes);

6x6                    2-1/2 ton truck