

VIII

Early Military Service

Fort McDowell

When the Army recruiter promised that we would be in the Army Air Corps, and would be allowed to attend a school to train us for a job, Ernie Alexander and I relented. The next thing we knew we were at Fort McDowell, which was located on an island in the San Francisco Bay known as Angel Island. There, we filled out a lot of papers, were sworn in, given uniforms, and told to wait for assignment. The date was November 9, 1939. We were free to go to San Francisco, but with the amount of money we had, we could do little but walk around. We had turned in our civilian clothes for shipment home. As rookies, we were not allowed to have civilian clothes. All we could wear was the uniform of a buck private.

We did get some other duties while at Angel Island. We did a little KP (kitchen police), and one day I was assigned fatigue duty on the General Coxe, the launch that served the island. We went to San Francisco and docked at the Fort Mason docks and loaded up rations and other provisions, including water, since the island had no water supply. We also carried provisions for the federal prison on Alcatraz Island. On the way back to Angel Island, we docked at Alcatraz and unloaded some material there. Alcatraz is now closed. After the Indian occupation in the '60's, most of the flammable material was burned. Angel Island now has no military function, and is a state park. The last time I saw the General Coxe, it was tied up in Oakland at Jack London Square, and had been converted to a restaurant.

Hamilton Field

In a couple of weeks, we were given our permanent assignment to 7th Bomb Group at Hamilton Field, California, an organization in which I was to spend the next five years. Hamilton Field was located on the San Francisco Bay, in Marin County, on the northern peninsula, across the Golden Gate from San Francisco. We had to wait a couple of weeks until enough recruits filtered in to form a recruit squadron for training. Our time was spent on such tasks as mowing the lawn, KP, and building a swimming pool. Soon we had the required number of recruits and training began. It consisted mostly of close order drill, customs of the service, the manual of court martial, and the like. As I recall, it lasted about a month. We were given two tests, an Alpha and a Beta. The Alpha test was to test our IQ and the Beta test was to determine what technical training we were eligible to attend. In the IQ exam, I made out like a bandit. I had an IQ of 132, which is very high, but the beta test did me in. The results were that I would be ineligible to attend the mechanics school, which was the school I wanted to attend, because I didn't get a high enough score in the mathematics portion.

For the first time in my life, I took stock of the situation and decided that I'd better get some math training. The local junior college in San Raphael was offering night courses, and the base would provide transportation. I signed up and took a couple of courses in algebra. I have remained an ardent student to this day. Without a training school background, a large number of us recruits were assigned to the motor pool. My truck driving experience in the National Guard paid off. We were taught to drive every kind of vehicle from motorcycles to 2 ½ ton trucks. I took to the motorcycles and rode them every chance I got. They all had sidecars, so we could carry one passenger, or other freight. There were a few times that we took the side car off, such as when we were escorting convoys.

The Daily Routine

Military service was quite a bit different before the war and the draft. Discipline was strict and severe. Living conditions were stark and simple. Each soldier had a bunk, wall locker, foot locker and stand for the foot locker. At this time we were still not "airmen" but soldiers, and we were treated as soldiers. The day was laid out by the bugle from first call to taps. Calisthenics came first, followed by breakfast, which was served family style. You sat at the table and the food was brought to you in bowls and platters. The privates ate together, with a corporal at the head of the table. The Sergeants had a table to themselves. If by chance the first sergeant were to eat with us, the meal did not begin until he arrived with the troops sitting at attention until told to eat. All of the food was served by KP's, "kitchen police" selected from a roster of all the enlisted members of the organization. After breakfast, bunks were made and the bays were swept and mopped down. Foot and wall lockers were dusted and shoes were shined and displayed on the foot locker stand under the foot locker. The lockers were dusted and made ready for inspection.

On Saturdays, there was a stand-by inspection in the barracks. This meant clean uniforms, fresh haircuts, white collars on the bunks, footlockers and wall lockers open. Socks, underwear, handkerchiefs, toilet gear etc., had to be folded exactly the same, neat and in proper order, with the last four letters of one's serial number visible on each article. Also, there was a certain manner in which the items were to be displayed in the wall locker. The barracks were two-story structures with open bays and rooms at each end where the barracks chief stayed, usually a buck sergeant or a corporal. A latrine orderly was detailed each day. After the troops left, he would clean and mop the latrine and police up the inside and outside of the barracks. Everything had to be neat and orderly around the barracks. There was a saying, "If it moves, salute it. If it is still, pick it up. If you can't pick it up, paint it."

The troop area consisted of the barracks, a mess hall, and a day room for each squadron. At taps, it was lights out. If you wanted to read, it was either in the latrine or the day room. The day room typically held a number of easy chairs, card tables, a pool table, and, if the squadron could afford it, a radio, and a few magazines. Space was provided in one of these buildings for a barber, and that was usually the place where you took your laundry, also. Credit was given during the month for haircuts, laundry, P.X. Checks, all on twenty-one dollars a month. You had to be careful or you would end up broke at payday.

Payday

Payday was greatly anticipated, and perhaps with some trepidation, if you had too much on account. On payday, we had to be blitzed and polished to be paid. We fell into a line by rank and serial number. The paymaster, usually a lieutenant, would call your name, and you would step to the front of the table and give your serial number, and then you would be paid in cash, less money for the laundry, two-bits for the old soldiers' home, and two-bits for the Salvation Army, and P.X. Checks. If there was anything left over, you got it.

After paycall, most of us went to the P.X. and stocked up on personal needs to keep us through the month. Soap, shaving supplies and other toilet supplies were obtained. The smokers would get a carton of cigarettes, "tailormades", and a package of Bull Durham. The cigarettes were for after dinner or going out. Otherwise, they rolled their own using the Bull Durham. Being a nonsmoker, I escaped the last item.

After paycall was complete, the dayroom turned into a miniature gambling casino with craps played on the pool table, and poker or blackjack on the other tables. NCOs were not supposed to gamble with the privates, but after a few hours of gambling among the privates, a few men had captured most of the cash from those that gambled. Then came the big game, in which the NCOs became involved. For a private to afford a weekend in San Francisco, he would have to win big.

The 7th Bomb Group

The barracks were near the hangers, and a few times we got to go along on training missions. The 7th Bomb Group at the time was equipped with B-18s and was converting to B-17s. The B-18 was a bomber version of the Douglas DC-3. Not much of a bomber, the B-18 was underpowered, flew low and slow. The B-17, although we had fewer of them, was a much later aircraft. It became the standard bomber of World War II. It had four supercharged engines and could fly at high altitude and carry a pretty good bomb load.

I was completely enthralled with airplanes, and knew that I would do everything I could to become a pilot. But, becoming a pilot at that time required a college education. Even then, few were chosen. I felt that being a pilot was beyond my grasp.

Training School, Lowry Field

We hung out in the motor pool, and one by one, we were sent off to training of some sort. Since I didn't qualify for mechanics school, I decided to take the first school offered. My opportunity came about the first of June 1940, when I was given a chance to attend school at Lowry Field in Denver. The school was titled Supply and Technical Clerks. A couple of my friends were also selected, including First Sergeant, Alexander E. Keegen, a man I learned to admire. My two friends were Cecil Haines and Harold Rightbower.

As an aside, Sgt. Keegen was in the Philippines when the war started and did not come out. I never learned what happened to him. Many years later at Castle Air Force Base, California, I was the pilot on night duty as Aerodrome Officer. When I came on duty, I noted on the board that a flight of three fighters were due in a couple of hours. When they arrived, I

went out to meet them and bring them into the operations office where they could close their flight plans and I noticed that the name on the flight plan for the three planes was Keegan. I asked him if he knew Alexander E. Keegan, and he said that he was his father.

Since Keegan had a family to take care of, he went out to Denver on the train. The other two fellows and I headed east in Rightbower's old Plymouth. We left on a Friday and drove straight through. Early Sunday morning we were in Cheyenne, Wyoming. As we crossed a railroad, at an overpass, there was a big pothole in the pavement. When Rightbower's right rear wheel hit that hole, it broke off and passed the car going up the railroad overpass. So there we were - Sunday morning, in a strange town, a broken rear axle, and our car was stranded on an overpass. Finally, a local policeman was kind to us and said that he would round up a mechanic. Soon, help arrived and the car was towed away to a garage where the axle was replaced. We had very little money, but managed to rake together enough to get us out of there. Denver was not too far away. We got into Lowry field that afternoon and checked in.

Lowry Field was a nice place to be stationed. It was close to downtown Denver and a bus ran by the base that provided service into town. The school was not very rigorous, and I became acquainted with a number of other dogfaces. We studied typing, English, and the formalities of military communication. We also learned about the system for keeping track of airplanes, and all the forms used in the Supply Room.

The course lasted five months, if my memory is correct. We started about the first of July and got out near the end of November. At this time, the Air Corp was expanding very rapidly and most of the students in our class were unassigned. They had come to school directly from boot camp and had never been assigned to an operating organization. A few of us had been assigned, such as the four of us from the 7th Bomb Group.

With the expansion of the Air Corps, they were hurting for instructors. The word came down that our class was going to be held for additional training as instructors. Those of us who were already assigned to organizations put up a howl and wanted to go back to our organizations. To no avail, we were held while they figured out what to do with us. After lying around for a month, we were told that those with assignments would be returned to their organizations. Ironically, the day before Christmas, we were given our orders and told to shove off. Rightbower had traded his Plymouth in on an Essex Terraplane, so we loaded our gear into his car and took off for Salt Lake City.

Trip to Salt Lake

What a trip. We left about four in the afternoon on old Route 40, which goes directly through the Rocky Mountains. It was in the middle of the winter, and this was before freeways. Rightbower said that he was raised in Nebraska and that snow and ice didn't scare him. The big tunnels were not built at that time, and route 40 climbed over the mountains, through Rabbit Ears Pass. We got as far as Steamboat Springs and had a flat tire. It was late at night; the temperature was hovering around zero degrees, and everything was closed. Again, a policeman came to our rescue and got a local service station operator to open his shop and fix our tire. The fellow had a hard time finding the hole in the tube (yes, we used

inner tubes in those days). When he found the hole, he was so proud that he patched it and put it back in the tire without removing the nail from the tire.

After about another 50 miles, the tire went flat again. We were out in the mountains, with no one around, so Rightbower and I changed the tire. I was never so cold in my life. Later on the trip, we ran into ice fog and the heaters and wipers on the car were not adequate to the task. The windshield iced up. To blow it off, we opened the windows and continued on to Salt Lake, arriving there about nine o'clock the next morning. It was Christmas day and there was no one about. We finally got bedding and were assigned bunks. The first Sergeant was aroused, and told us to get out of Dodge.

He gave us what we called a basket leave. The leave would be drawn up and put in a hold basket. If we got back as ordered, the leave was thrown away. He told us to be back after New Years. I got a bus and took off for Manteca. I stayed in Manteca a few days and came down with the worst cold I have ever had, probably as a result of that trip from Salt Lake City. Since I didn't enjoy being home, I got the bus and went back to Salt Lake City. It was still during the Christmas holidays, with few people around, so I crawled into my bunk. In the middle of the night, there was a fire in a hanger at the airport, and all hands were ordered out. I couldn't make it out of my bunk. The next day, I reported to the hospital and was confined there several days. The first sergeant that was with us at Lowry Field came by the hospital and presented me with orders promoting me to corporal. I was mighty proud of that promotion, the first of my military career. I went from being a private soldier to a noncommissioned officer.

IX

Salt Lake City

During our absence, the 7th Bomb Group had transferred from Hamilton Field to the Airfield at Salt Lake. There were no barracks on the airfield, so we were all quartered at Ft. Douglas, on the other side of town.

My buddy, Ernie Alexander, with whom I joined the service, was also not qualified for technical training and was sent to parachute rigger school. I don't believe that he ever packed a chute, but he ended up in Technical Supply, handling requisitions and maintaining parts and supplies for aircraft and allied equipment.

When I got out of the hospital, I was reassigned to the motor pool. Being a Corporal, they put me in charge of the supply room. There wasn't much to do in the supply room, and there was already one other soldier assigned there, so I spent a lot of time driving trucks, cars and motorcycles. I helped the motor sergeant make up the daily schedules, and other paper work. A corporal had a little authority in those days, but damned little. Barracks were being built on the airport and soon all of our squadron was moved to the airport except the motor pool. The motor pool remained at Ft. Douglas, so the folks assigned to the motor pool were also given barrack space at Ft. Douglas. That is how we spent the next few months while buildings were being built on the Airport. During the summer, the buildings were finished and everything was moved to the new buildings at the site dubbed The Salt Lake Airdrome Lease.

We remained at Ft. Douglas for a while. After the squadron moved out, I was the highest ranking airman from the headquarters squadron left at Ft. Douglas. That didn't last long, however. Soon there was room at the airport, and we all moved there. At about that time, I was relieved of my duty with the motor pool and assigned to the squadron supply room. My old buddy, Rightbower, was the supply sergeant, so we got along fine.

In the spring of 1941, the Air Corps opened a new program of pilot training, the flying sergeant's program, which was available to those without a college degree. When a person graduated from the program, he was given a pilot's rating, but received only the rank of staff sergeant. I immediately applied for the program, and was tentatively accepted. However, circumstances intervened to prevent me from going. Our order overseas halted my attendance. A ruling came out that anyone on overseas orders would be removed from the program and must reapply upon return to the states. In my case, that was to be just over one year. However, I did not get back for over three years and the world had changed in the interim.

X

Heading Overseas – 1941

By late summer 1941, the squadrons began to get their assigned number of flight crews and aircraft. Some were sent to other bases to pick up their aircraft and were to join the rest of the group overseas. We had a number of experienced flight crews, but the Air Corps was expanding so rapidly that we were getting some rather inexperienced crews as well. September and October were busy months. Anything that didn't move got packed and ready to ship to San Francisco. In early October, an advance detail was shipped ahead of the main body to prepare for our arrival. My good friend Sergeant Keegen was a member of that group. Unfortunately, when the Japanese invaded later, he was last seen with a rifle heading into the jungle.

In late October, the rest of us were given our orders to move to San Francisco for shipment overseas. They were short of drivers, so I volunteered to drive a vehicle. I was assigned a Jeep. With my motor pool experience, I was to help herd the convoy to San Francisco. It took us two days. The first day we drove to Reno, and the second day we made it in. The trucks were delivered to Ft. Mason for shipment and the drivers were herded aboard a water taxi and taken to Ft. McDowell on Angel Island.

Ft. McDowell was also a recruit reception depot - the one where Ernie and I were recruited - and was rather crowded. The mess hall could handle as many as 3,000 at a seating. Since we were to be there several days, Ernie and I got a three-day pass and took off for what turned out to be our last visit to Manteca for a long time. We were also given all sorts of fatigue duty. I don't recall that I did anything famous other than some paperwork with the first Sergeant Nelson. Since Sgt. Keegen was transferred out and was already on his way overseas, we were assigned a new First Sgt., Roland O. Nelson.

The USS Republic

Soon we were restricted to camp, went through a number of inspections, and were issued certain combat gear. Early on November 21, we marched aboard the water taxi with everything we owned in our barracks bag and musette bag (a small backpack), and were taken to Ft. Mason and put aboard the *USS Republic* for our shipment overseas. The *Republic* was built as a German passenger vessel prior to WWI. The United States got it as reparations at the end of the war. It was a rather large vessel, some 30,000 tons which had been converted to a troop transport and could hold a considerable number of troops. It's my memory that there were more than 3,000 troops aboard the ship when we sailed, including the 7th Bomb Group and pieces of other organizations, including a number of pilots from the 51th Pursuit Group.

After we were all safely aboard, and everything was ship shape, we cast off and set sail for Honolulu. Our squadron was bedded down on the third deck below the main weather deck, just about the water line and near the bow. We were packed in rather tightly. While underway, we could hear the water lapping around the bow. The bunks were attached to pipes that ran from the deck to the overhead. Between each set of pipes the bunks were four deep. Fortunately, I got a top bunk. Our First Sgt., an experienced soldier, told us all to stand by and he would try to get us some relief. Within a few hours aboard, there was a meeting of 1st Sergeants and Squadron Commanders to assign duties. Nelson got all he could get.

As a corporal, I was put in charge of the officer's scullery, a room where the officer's mess gear was cleaned up. Three times a day our crew would report to the officer's mess and clean up. We had enough assigned that only about one-third of us were needed at any particular time. There were so many enlisted soldiers that they had to eat in shifts, and then only two meals a day. The enlisted mess was arraigned so that you had to stand up to eat. They also got some strange combinations, such as beans for breakfast. On board the ship, all of the mess attendants and cooks for the officers' mess were Filipinos. As scullery help, we got to eat with the officers cooks. Some of the Filipinos food was strange to our tastes, but we got fresh milk, desserts left over from the officer's mess, and all sorts of good stuff the other soldiers did not get. I learned to eat rice with gravy, something I had missed in my life. Others in the squadron were given duties of one kind or another. It beat doing nothing and there were certain benefits connected with each job.

We were outside the Golden Gate just before dark. As we proceeded past the Farallon Islands, the sea became rough. In spite of the 30,000 ton mass of the vessel, we began to pitch and roll. Soon, about two-thirds of the passengers were sea-sick. I was glad to be on the top bunk, for soon the deck below was awash with vomit. It never bothered me more than making me feel a little dizzy. Within a day or two almost all recovered. However, there were a couple of guys that stayed sick as long as the sea was rough.

Honolulu, Hawaii

On the morning of November 28, 1941, my 21st birthday, we went on deck and the Hawaiian Islands were in view; we were approaching Honolulu. When we tied up around 10:00AM, it was decided that we could go ashore. There would be two shifts, one from 12:00 to 4:00 PM, and the other from 4:00 to 8:00 PM. We were to choose which we wanted. Everyone wanted the later shift, but Ernie and I figured rather quickly that if we went ashore on the first group there wasn't a hell of a lot that could be done if we came back with the second shift.

Ernie's parents had come from Hawaii, and he had relatives there. A cousin who was a policeman in Honolulu knew that we were coming. When we got ashore, Ernie called him and he came to the ship and picked us up. He had taken the day off and we got a great tour of the island. The island was packed with servicemen of all types. Ernie's cousin took us to a fancy restaurant, the name of which I don't recall, but it was well known, where we were told that it was restricted to officers only. The cousin showed his badge and explained that that was illegal. We were seated and I drank my first legal drink. It was something called okoleou or something like that. It was a Hawaiian drink of some sort. We visited his home and just

before the eight o'clock deadline, we were taken back to the ship. We had figured it out correctly. They didn't even check our passes.

I was surprised that Hawaii was getting ready to defend itself. The beaches contained rolls of barbed wire, guns were mounted atop the tallest buildings, and MP's roamed the streets.

The next morning was spent loading food, water and other necessities aboard the ship. In the late afternoon, we shoved off, and were again at sea. We settled into our routine and in a day or two, we noticed that we were sailing south. The Philippines are almost due west of Hawaii. We had also been joined by other ships. There was another troop transport, the *Holbrook*, the *Bloom Fontane*, a Dutch freighter, and some Navy ships. As I recall, there were about seven ships in the convoy. We were sailing almost due south. On the sixth of December, 1941, we crossed the equator. The Philippines are north of the equator.

December 6th, 1941

Crossing the equator is quite an event for the Navy. Those who have been across the equator are shellbacks, and those who had not been across were polliwogs. It was the time for the shellbacks to initiate the polliwogs into the realm of Neptunis Rex. The shellbacks had devised clubs, made of canvas and filled with Kapok, a life preserver material. They were then soaked in water and one could be clobbered with the device without serious harm. Canvas tanks had been rigged up on the decks and we were dunked in that, while being clobbered with the clubs. They also cut your hair, at least in one spot. The convoy was slowed and the troop transports were stopped dead in the water, and cargo nets were lowered over the side, since throwing folks overboard was not unheard of. About four in the afternoon, the ceremony was stopped, the ship was cleaned up, and the convoy got underway.

December 7th, 1941

The next morning, we went about our chores until around eight o'clock when there was a call to general quarters. All passengers were to go to their bunks and stay there until they were told otherwise. About the time we got to our bunks, the loud speakers came on and a voice said, "This is the Captain speaking. I just wanted to inform you that this morning, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. A state of war exists between Japan and the United States. Judge your actions accordingly."

One of the comedians in our outfit, Harley Miller, broke into song singing a Civil War ditty about "just before the battle mother." I was somewhat surprised by the comments of the soldiers aboard the ship. We had no news except what was received by the radiomen on the ship. They would put out brief notes on the bulletin board. Forecasts on the outcome of the war were rife. I was surprised at the braggadocio that was heard among the airmen in our bay. However, we were unaware that, with the exception of the carriers, the Pacific Fleet lay disabled at Pearl Harbor.

Some said that the war would be over in six weeks. The US Fleet would sail to Japan and pound them into submission in a short period of time. As I lay on my bunk, my thoughts

ran along different lines. First, I wondered if we would ever reach the Philippines. Since the convoy sailed from Hawaii, word must have gotten to the Japanese of our sailing, and even our destination. We could have been tracked all the way from Hawaii.

I calculated that we could very well be in combat before long. I thought back to past wars and recalled that at the outbreak of the Civil War, men on both sides swamped the recruiting offices, all with the notion that that the war would be over rather quickly, and they wanted to get an enemy before the war was over. At the first battle of the war at Manassas, the Confederates came within sight of the spires of Washington and knew the war would be over as soon as they marched through Washington. At the beginning of World War I, General Pershing stepped on the docks in France and said, "Lafayette, we are here." Many thought that the war was about over. However, in each case, the war was long and bitter, suffering many casualties. I could not see how this one would be any different. I also worried that a submarine would get us, because we would be a prize target. On our troop ship we had over three thousand soldiers. I thought that we were in for a long war, and that was later proved true.

Much later, we learned that the 9th Squadron's complement of aircraft arrived in Hawaii on the morning of December 7th. Their guns were stowed and there was no ammunition aboard. Fortunately, they all got into an airfield someplace on the other islands and none were shot down, although one landed on a golf course.

Soon we were released from general quarters. It became clear why we had sailed south and why we were in a convoy. By watching the sun and the stars, we knew that we were turning to the west. Several days later, we awoke one morning and were within sight of islands. We sailed around these islands during that day. But, the next morning, when we went on deck, we were again in the open sea, heading west. We were told that we had been in the Samoas. It was obvious to us that the convoy was in a quandary and the ships were awaiting orders of some sort as to where and how we were to proceed.

The ship had provisions for only two weeks, so things began to be tight. Fresh water was cut off except for a few faucets where we could fill our canteens. Also, there were no fresh water showers, only salt water. Later in December, about the eighteenth, we again sighted islands. We learned we were in the Fiji Islands and that we were to dock at Suva for provisions. We docked (no one was allowed on shore) and we were hastily provisioned. Since I worked in the officer's mess, I went down on the docks, but only to load food for the officers' mess. I did get to talk to some of the Fijian policemen who wore no weapon, but did wear skirts. They seemed to be a sort of copy of the Scots' kilts, but they were white with a purple scallop around the hem. I asked one man where his weapon was, and he folded up his fist and said that that was his weapon, laughing heartily. Within twenty four hours we were again underway, heading west.

During the time we were at sea, since the war started, which was about a month, there was a lot of talk about our convoy being attacked. We were all a little nervous, and it seemed certain that the Japanese would know that a convoy had sailed out of Honolulu heading west and they would be looking for us. We had sailed far south of our normal route to the Philippines, but we still felt threatened. We were in the tropics since leaving Honolulu, and

we spent most of our idle time on the deck. Card games, singing, guitar playing, and all sorts of amusements were prevalent. Many brought reading material aboard and there was a small library on the ship. Before the war started, movies were shown in the evenings, but after the seventh, we were completely blacked out.

On the morning of the 23rd of December, a group of us were on the foredeck looking forward. Over the horizon, some ships appeared headed in our direction. We all felt a gasp and just knew that the Japs had finally found us. Over the next hour or so we speculated on what was to occur. As they drew rather close to the convoy, they turned broadside to the convoy. There was a cruiser and a couple of destroyers. We were then told that they belonged to the Royal Australian Navy who had come out to escort us into Australia. We were escorted into the mouth of a river where we anchored. Brisbane was located upstream about five miles and because of the draft of the Republic we had to wait for high tide to get the ship up to the dock. On the morning of the 24th, the ship prepared to get under way. It had lain with its bottom on the silt of the harbor, and it was stuck in the mud. All hands were ordered on deck and we all ordered to port, then all to starboard. We rocked the ship enough that she broke free and we continued on until we were soon docked in Brisbane.

XI

Australia

In the morning, as the ship moved up the inlet to the city of Brisbane, we were told to get our gear together and prepare to disembark. As soon as the ship was tied up at the dock, we left and marched a couple of miles to a race course where the Australians had prepared a tent city for our emergency housing. We settled in and later in the afternoon, the Australians laid out an evening meal. Since it was Christmas, the Australians did all they could for us. Some complained that the sausage we had was made with mutton, which it probably was. However, I found it to be okay. They did have great, five gallon cans of fresh milk, which was right down my alley. The bread was good, also. The Australians ate a lot of lamb and mutton, and some beef, but not like the Americans. After selecting a number for guard and fatigue duty, we were all given passes to town. We hastily got ourselves cleaned up and headed for a night on the town. There was a bus that ran by the racecourse and we took off.

The Australians were fine people. We all admired and respected them. On our first night in town, it was difficult to buy a drink. The Aussies would buy them for you. They were amazed that the war, for the Bloody Yanks, as they called us, had only started on December 7th and here we were on December 24th and a large number of troops had landed in Australia. Some of the southern boys weren't sure that they wanted to be called Yankees, but they soon got used to it. Of course, the Australians had been fighting for over three years. Many of their young males were in England, North Africa and other posts throughout the world. They drove on the wrong side of the street, and they used more slang terms than I had ever heard before. Naturally, we picked it up and before long we were sounding like the Aussies.

Australia reminded many of us of the United States some years before. The houses of the middle class were nice, but the bathroom was outside in most of them. Appliances were a few years behind, and even their cars were a year or two behind in styling and mechanics. The residents were primarily caucasians. A rather large percentage of them were descendants of the criminals of England that were sentenced to "transportation", which means that they were sent out to Australia as almost indentured servants. The "Outback" or the rural part of Australia was managed much like the American South. There were a few large land owners controlling much of the useable land, squatters they were called. The country was sparsely populated with only a few million people in a land area two thirds the size of the U.S. Most of the population was along the littoral of the country, and that was along the southeast and southern part. Much of the interior was desert. Along the west coast there were producing mines of various kinds. We all felt that the Aussies were very close to us in the way they were formed, and their background. They still recognized the queen, but she was only a symbol. Politically, they were completely free.

One evening, after we had been there a few days, an Australian reconnaissance aircraft reported that he had seen a submarine lurking off shore. The military pushed the panic button. All of our trucks and other rolling stock were then parked on the docks. The order went out to disperse those vehicles. A number of drivers were rounded up, including yours truly, and we were taken to the docks, cranked up whatever vehicle we could and got them in a group, and followed a jeep into the residential area. At a signal, the leading truck would be parked and the driver would go to the jeep. Eventually, all of the trucks were dispersed all over the residential area near the docks. No attack took place, and it took the motor pool a number of days to recover their vehicles.

The longshoremen were overloaded with the arrival so many ships. Therefore, crews were organized to help with the unloading. As a corporal, I was given a crew and sent to one of the freighters to help unload. We stayed on the ship about three days. When we weren't working, we rummaged about the ship to see if we could find anything to satisfy our hunger. We came across a case of canned grapefruit. It was all peeled and in sections. I stuffed myself with the grapefruit until I became violently ill. To this day, I will not eat grapefruit, if I can avoid it.

In a few days, we began to get a little better organized. The freighters in the convoy unloaded their cargo and much of it was intended for units that were in the Philippines. There were about a hundred P-40s (Pursuit Planes), in boxes, intended for a fighter group that had not yet arrived. There was also a number of A-24s which is an Air Corps version a Navy dive bomber which the Navy designated as SDBs. The units, for which they were intended, were not there and the aircraft that was intended for our group was in the Philippines.

The RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) had a couple of bases near Brisbane, and the mechanics in our group were divided up. Some were sent to Archer Field, nearest to Brisbane, and the others to Amberly Field, a bit further out. They immediately set about assembling the aircraft, A-24s at Archer, and P-40s at Amberly. Most of the mechanics of our group were at Amberly. We had no supply room, as such, and I was left hanging. I began to drive staff cars. I drove the group commander around for a couple of days and he requested that I be assigned as his permanent driver. That was the job I held for the time the organization stayed in Australia.

Once we settled in, the Army began to spend money like a drunken sailor. They took over the best hotel in town, and bought every new car they could get their hands on. The racecourse tent city was still operated, and that is where I slept at night, but I spent most of my time at the newly acquired hotel. One of the restaurants in the hotel was turned into a military mess hall and I ate most of my meals there. That was a pretty cushy berth for a small farm boy. The Australians also moved a number of folks into the hotel, and, as the Aussies say, "me clobber", my friend, was one of the Aussie drivers. He too, was a farm boy, from a cattle station in the interior of Australia.

There was a dance hall in Brisbane that we all enjoyed. Generally, there were more women than men, since so many of the Australian men were overseas. During intermissions, everyone would gather on the floor and a screen would be lowered and a projector would display the words to a song, with a bouncing ball to lead the singing. There was always

“Waltzing Matilda”. The song contained a lot of Australian slang and was sort of the unofficial anthem of Australia. To an Australian, when you are walking with a pack on your back, you are “Waltzing Matilda.”

There was one incident of which most of the Yanks were not very proud. A number of men from our organization got together in a hotel, not the one I was in, and proceeded to get as drunk as possible and then set out to trash the hotel. They were raiding other rooms, throwing furniture out the windows, and behaving like real asses. We had a Master Sergeant Suggs in our outfit. He was a senior NCO in the squadron and had a lot of influence with the men in the squadron. As soon as he heard about it, he went to the hotel and asked the manager what the damages were and how much it would cost to repair them. Given a number, Suggs went back to the organization, called all the men together, told them what the bill was, and told them to come up with the money. He didn't want the Americans to get a bad reputation. Everyone divvied up and got enough money to clear the account and a bit more which Suggs took to the hotel. No publicity got out about the incident, but Suggs got his revenge by only allowing a few men at a time off the base.

One afternoon, the group commander had me take him to the docks where we boarded a harbor craft of some sort, and we were taken to the outer harbor where a large passenger vessel was at anchor. The commander told me to meet him back at the boarding ladder in about an hour, and he took off. The ship was a brand new passenger liner of the President lines. It was on its maiden voyage when the war started and was immediately recalled and taken over by the Army. There was a fighter group aboard and other attached organizations, including a lot of P-40 pilots and mechanics from the 51st Pursuit Group. I ate lunch with some of the airmen, looked the ship over, and went back to the boarding ladder. The commander soon appeared and we were taken back to the dock where our car was parked and I took him back to the hotel.

In driving the officials around, I was often at the two bases, Archer and Amberly. I had friends on both. Somehow, they rounded up enough pilots to fly the airplanes as they were assembled. The war was not going well and the Philippines were being evacuated. The airplanes of the 7th Bomb Group, and the 19th Bomb Group got into the Philippines and were active; however, they were pulling back to Java and were short most of their ground personnel. The airplanes of the 7th and their crews joined up with the 19th. Both were ill equipped. All of the Seventh's ground personnel were in Australia. A lot of the group's planes in the Philippines had been wrecked or were shot down.

During our stay in Australia, the war had not gone well for the Western Pacific. The Philippines were falling, and the aircraft of both the 7th and 19th Bomb Groups were pulled back to Java, an island in the Dutch East Indies, now called Indonesia. It was decided that the members of those organizations, and the fighter group would be shipped to Java. McArthur was ordered out of the Philippines and he moved his headquarters to Melbourne, Australia. He used a submarine to get out of Manila, which took him to the southern island of Mindanao, where his group boarded a 7th Bomb Group B-17 and was flown to Melbourne, Australia.

These were sad times. We received no mail, nor could we send any. Many wrote letters but there was no way to get them to the States. My family in Manteca had not heard from me since I left the States, and since they knew that we were heading for Hawaii, they imagined all sorts of dire outcomes. It was some time later before I got any mail to them. The war was going against us. The Japanese were taking over all of Southeast Asia, with their oil fields and rubber plantations. We didn't have as much information about the war in Europe, but we knew that we weren't doing well. Hitler had taken over most of mainland Europe. Even the popular songs of the period were very sad.

It was determined that we could do more good by being in Java than in Australia. What aircraft the 7th and 19th had were located there. Rumors circulated that we would soon be leaving Australia.

XII

On to India

The organization was again on the move in March 1942. It was boots and saddles. We packed our gear, marched to the docks and were embarked on the good ship *SS Holbrook*. I don't know how many were on the vessel, but we were crowded. Chow lines ran the length of the ship and we had only two meals a day. We sailed from Brisbane, and headed south. You would think that we would go north to get to Indonesia, but the Japanese controlled the eastern approaches and we were going to go around Australia and approach from the west. A day later we docked in Melbourne. Since the ship laid there for a couple of days, we got to go ashore.

I don't recall anything famous happening. This was a big town. General McArthur had established his headquarters there. We sailed south from Melbourne, and continued south for a while before turning to the west across the Great Australian Bight. In Western Australia there is a rather large city, as Australian cities go, called Perth. We docked in a smaller harbor town, Fremantle. We stayed there two or three days as other ships arrived and then we sailed with a convoy. The first aircraft carrier the Navy built, named the *USS Langley*, was in the convoy. It was no longer used by the Navy as a carrier. Therefore, part of the deck had been removed and she was called a seaplane tender. For this trip, there were 50 P-40s loaded on the carrier deck. These aircraft had been flown across Australia and landed in Perth. Also aboard were 50 pilots, 50 mechanics, and a number of armament mechanics. There was an icebreaker, *Bloemfontein*; a freighter, the *MS Seawitch*; another passenger ship, and various Navy vessels.

As our ship was being prepared for sailing, a band came out to see us off, playing some good Yankee songs. The ship was pushed into the channel by tugs and after it had traveled a short distance something went afoul with the steering mechanism and she ran aground. The tugs again huffed and puffed and got us back to the dock where repairs were undertaken. In a couple of hours we were again ready to be pushed out into the channel, and again the band came out and played the same songs as we sailed away.

The convoy left Fremantle heading north in a rather loose formation. As dusk descended on us the second day out, we saw flashes off to the north. The comment was made that it appeared we were getting a little heat lightning. However, we soon learned that the *Langley* had been torpedoed and sunk. The freighter, *Seawitch*, which normally sailed on our starboard side, turned back to help with the rescue. It picked up a number of survivors and was preparing to get underway when it too was sunk. Many of the poor jokers were torpedoed twice in a few hours. The Australian Coast Guard was able to rescue a number of the survivors.

The passenger vessels turned to a westerly heading and in a couple of days we put in at Colombo, Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. The Japanese had been there a few days earlier and had damaged the harbor. A couple of ships were still sitting at the docks with only their stacks showing. They had been sunk at their moorings. There, we took on provisions and no one was allowed ashore. We couldn't dock and we were anchored out in the roadstead.

The ships stayed overnight in Colombo, and the next day we got underway and sailed northwestward. In a couple of days, we docked in Karachi, India, now Pakistan. As I recall, it was about the middle of March, 1942.

Boomerang

While in Australia, Ernie acquired a little black cocker spaniel pup that he named Boomerang. When we left Australia, Ernie sneaked her aboard the ship and we took her with us to India. That dog stayed with us for the entire time we were overseas. When Ernie left for the States, another soldier took over as the guardian. Later, I understand, the dog made it into the States.

XIII

Karachi and Movement East

Arriving in the port of Karachi, India, we disembarked and were loaded on trucks to be transported to the international airport north of town a few miles. At an earlier time, England had tried to establish an airline between England and Australia using large rigid airships. Karachi was selected to be one of the stops on the route from London to Melbourne. To service these airships, a very large hanger was built at the airport. The first airship built, the R101, crashed before it ever reached Karachi, and the airline was abandoned. Temporarily, the passengers from both troop ships were bedded down in that hanger; and there were over 3,000 troops in all. There was still room for a few small airplanes at one end of the hanger.

While the hanger was large enough to hold 3,000 cots, services were limited. Outside one of the doors, a long slit trench was dug to be used as a latrine. Kitchens were set up and food was served, using rations provided by the British. From the meals served, a high percentage of the men came down with dysentery. Given the limited toilet facilities and the number of flies that were about, one can imagine the sanitary condition of the hanger for the next few days.

Tent cities were erected around the airport and soon the members of the 7th Bomb Group were moved into our own tent city. A number of aircraft for the fighter group were being uncrated and those boxes became our orderly room, medic station and mess kitchen. There was no place to sit down to eat. You got your food and sat anywhere you could. Given the climate in Karachi, that was not much of a problem. It was warm in Karachi year around. We arrived there in March as summer was approaching.

We stayed in large British tents. The British were far better equipped to live in the hot climate than we were. Their tents were much better. There was a regular four-sided tent and then another tent over that, called a fly. The lower tent was quilted, which offered some respite from the heat; the air circulating between the two tents helped to cool it down. The British cot, called a charpoy, consisted of a wooden frame with rope laced across the frame in some pattern. They were heavier than, and not as comfortable as, our folding cots. The Brits clothes were also better. They wore shorts and short sleeved shirts, which we quickly adopted. They also wore a pith hat that was similar to the hats seen in movies of the desert war. The US Army had such a hat, but it was pressed out of cardboard and there was no comparison between the two. Many of us either bought a hat of the British version or conned one from the Brits.

War News

I began to wonder about the 7th Bomb Group and all of its personnel. We were ill-equipped, had no airplanes, and were several thousand miles from the nearest Americans. The Japanese were closing in from the west, and the Germans and Italians were closing in from the east. Rommel was taking over North Africa and Cairo was under siege. To the east, Burma was being taken by the Japanese. The United States had not made an offensive movement since America's entry into the war. Of course, the war was only a few months old as far as the U.S. was concerned. I had not written a letter nor had I received one since we left the states.

Around the first of April, a B-17 came through Karachi from Java, headed for the States. We were all told that if we wanted to write a letter it would be taken back to the States and mailed from there. I wrote a couple and that was the first news that my parents received from me. They were very concerned because they knew that I was headed for the Philippines, and it had fallen. After that, we wrote and received mail regularly, but it was very slow, traveling by water. Late news was sort of hard to come by. There was an English language newspaper out of Delhi, and BBC on radio. We had no place to get a paper, and the average GI didn't have a radio. There was no electricity in our quarters and those with battery-driven radios couldn't get batteries.

The Doolittle Raid

Colonel Jimmy Doolittle led the raid on Japan using B-25s that took off from an aircraft carrier, flew over Japan, and dropped their bombs before heading for China. They all had to crash land in China, but most of them got out and came through Karachi on their way home.

The AVGs

The American AVG squadrons were organized in Burma. But, as the Japanese pushed them out of there, they moved into China. The 51st fighter group that was on the boat with us was getting its act together; it was moved to China and the AVGs were deactivated. Some were absorbed into the 51st, and some went to the States to rejoin other organizations. Clair Chanault stayed behind and became the commanding general of the 14th Air Force in China.

Organization

When we left the States there were five squadrons in the 7th Bomb Group: the Headquarters Squadron, the 9th, 11th, and 22nd bomb squadrons, and the 88th Reconnaissance Squadron. In Karachi, the 11th and 22nd Squadrons were split off and became the basis of a B-25 group. The 88th was re-designated the 436th Bomb Squadron. Two other squadrons were formed - the 492nd and the 493rd. That made four bomb squadrons and a headquarters squadron. For a while, the 492nd and the 493rd existed only on paper. Temporarily, each new squadron had a total compliment of an officer and a couple of enlisted men. At that time, I got another break. Through some manipulation, and I suspect that Sgt. Suggs had something

to do with it, I was transferred to the 492nd squadron, promoted to staff sergeant and then transferred back to the 9th squadron, all within a period of a few weeks.

Illness

It was about this time that I contracted what was called the dingy, or sand fly fever. I was hospitalized for about a week, and when I returned to the squadron I had orders to go to a rest camp for recuperation. With a number of other folks, I was loaded on a train and transported to an old British camp named Gora Docca, high in the mountains overlooking Kashmir, in The North West Frontier. I'm not sure what Gora Docca means, but I am aware that Gora is horse, and I think that it means Horse Pen or something to that effect. Riding in an Indian troop train is best described by Kipling in his poem, *Gunga Din*: "*When the sweatin' troop-train lay, in a siding through the day, and the 'eat would make your bloomin' eyebrows crawl...*" The seats were wooden slats and were used as bunks at night. They were three high with the top two folded up during the day. The train went from Karachi through Hyderabad and pretty well followed the Indus River all the way up to Rawalpindi. It took a couple of days.

In Rawalpindi, we left the train and were loaded in trucks. From there we went through Abbottabad to our destination, Gora Docca. The altitude there was quite high. I don't remember exactly what it was, but we were warned to take it easy for the first twenty-four hours. We were quartered in stone barracks dating from an earlier period when the British maintained frontier stations along the Indian/Afghanistan border. Here we amused ourselves by walking around the mountains, riding horses, and generally relaxing. Just outside the barracks area, there was a sheer cliff on which the insignia of each British unit, that had been stationed there, was engraved. Near us was another British cantonment that was still occupied. A few British families were still posted there. We rode there on horses a few times and were treated to a meal in their club, where we got a sight of white women. It began to rain while we were there, and a bridge necessary for us to get to Rawalpindi washed out. We didn't mind a bit, and got to stay another week. We were eventually packed up, loaded on trucks and went back to Rawalpindi where we boarded a train for Karachi.

Back to the Unit

We began to accumulate a few airplanes. Some of those that came out of the East Indies arrived at our base, and a few began to trickle in from the States. I had been working around the orderly room and the supply room, and I decided that there was a war on and I wanted to make my contribution. We had a sergeant in our squadron who has been mentioned before, Master Sergeant Suggs. Even as an airman, he probably had more authority than anyone up to the commanding officer. He was the line chief, which is the enlisted individual responsible for all aircraft maintenance in a squadron. A couple of the squadrons in our group had split off and formed a new group, and a number of the older experienced mechanics began to leave for opportunities in the new outfits.

There was a great shortage of mechanics in the 9th squadron, the squadron to which I belonged. I approached Sgt. Suggs one day and asked if I could be assigned to the flight line; I thought I could be a good mechanic. He asked me where I grew up, and I told him that I