

had been raised on a farm. He asked about my experience with machinery on the farm and I told him about working on cars and other farm machinery. The upshot of the whole thing was that he told me to report to the line the following day to work with the aircraft. From that day forth, I was an aircraft mechanic, and later proved that I could be a good one.

The Tug

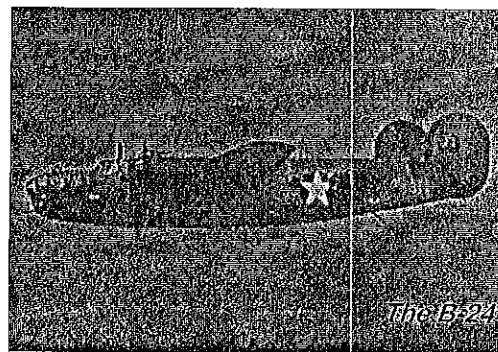
One tale on Sgt. Suggs: When we settled into our "permanent" quarters, we were given a hanger on one side of the field, and the fighter group was given a hanger on the other side of the field. Among the equipment that we brought with us from the States, and still possessed, was an International tug. This tug was the latest in such equipment. The tug was made by the International Truck company and the hood was made to resemble an International Truck. It had a generator, an air compressor, and other useful equipment installed on it so it could be used for things other than towing an airplane. Sgt. Suggs took great pride in that tug, as if it were his own, and had managed to keep it with us ever since we left the States.

At the time, we had no airplanes, or only a few, and the fighter group was beginning to accumulate a number of them. In a survey of the equipment in the possession of the various organizations, it was determined that the fighter group had a greater need for the tug than the bomb group, and it was given to them. Suggs was beside himself. He well knew that we would soon have aircraft and would have use for the tug. A short time after that, Sgt. Suggs and another master sergeant, Soderstrum, both with long and faithful careers in the Air Corps, were promoted to Majors. Once Suggs got squared away as a major, he immediately had our tug brought back to the squadron where it stayed for the rest of the war.

The B-17

The first aircraft that I worked on was the B-17. At that time, it was considered a front line bomber. It had four engines, a range of about 1,500 miles, and a payload of about 5,000 pounds, depending on the configuration. It had a crew of ten, including a pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, all of whom were officers, and a flight engineer, upper turret gunner, nose gunner, two waist gunners, a ball turret gunner, and a tail gunner. The rest of the crew was enlisted men. The ground crew consisted of a crew chief, and two or three mechanics. These mechanics were backed up by a series of specialists, such as instrument mechanics, sheet metal, and other specialists.

The squadron got a few of these airplanes that flew out of Java, and a few that came in from the States. The group that came in from the States was called Project X. One of the members of one of the flight crews was a Sgt. Tom Paylock. After arrival, Tom was grounded for some reason I can't recall. We became good friends and roommates for our stay in Panda. He was a good mechanic and was later a ground crew chief.



We had a great deal of trouble with the aircraft. The B-17s in India were equipped with nine-cylinder Wright engines that were built by Studebaker. It was the first batch of engines built by the automobile manufacturer, and they were difficult to maintain. Fortunately, the replacement aircraft we received was the B-24, which was quite a contrast. The B-17 was rather sleek and streamlined while the B-24 was boxy with twin tails and nose gear. They looked rather clumsy, but we found them much easier to maintain. The B-24 had a Pratt-Whitney fourteen-cylinder, twin-bank engine that had about the equivalent horsepower as the Wright engine. There was an expression among the pilots: they came overseas to fly B-17s and now they were flying the boxes they came in. In spite of its appearance, the B-24 was faster, had a greater payload, greater range, and was easier to maintain. It was all around a better aircraft for our purposes.

First Bombing Raid

While still in Karachi, on April 2-3, 1942, our squadron flew the first bombing raid on enemy territory out of India. B-17s, LB-30s and B-24s came from all squadrons in the group. However, the 9th Squadron was given credit.

The aircraft were flown to a base to the east in a town named Asansol, nearer to Burma where the Japanese lurked. At the advance base, the aircraft were fueled to the maximum, bombs were loaded, and the takeoff was scheduled in late afternoon for a night raid on Andaman Islands. A number of aircraft had gotten off when one had trouble on take-off. It drifted off the runway and hit a large stump. It crashed and caught fire, destroying the aircraft and killing the entire crew. The aircraft that were already airborne continued on the raid while those still on the ground stood down. The next day, all the aircraft returned to Karachi. The first raid of the 7th Bomb Group in India was but a pinprick, but it showed the Japanese that there was opposition building up in India.

More aircraft arrived and we began to look and act like a bomb squadron. One flight of aircraft came over for what was referred to as the HalPro project. Two colonels named Halverson and Proctor had gotten an idea approved that would bring a number of B-24s to India, continue on to China, and from there they would be the first to bomb the home Japanese Islands. Before they could get all of their aircraft assembled in Karachi, the war in North Africa was becoming desperate. New orders came down and all of the aircraft that could be mustered would be turned back to the Middle East to assist in the war against Rommel who was approaching the gates of Cairo, Egypt. All of the aircraft that were operational were sent to Lydda Airport at Tel Aviv, which was then Palestine. Many of my old buddies left. I was at the rest camp when this movement came about, and I missed going with them.

When I got back from the rest camp to the unit in Karachi, there was one B-17 that was going to the Middle East and I was selected to go along as the crew chief of the aircraft. We refueled in Iraq at a base named Habaniya, or something like that. It is difficult to find on a modern map, but it was just to the south of Baghdad, Iraq. We were only in Tel Aviv for a few days before we flew back to Karachi. At this time, I can't remember why we went. However, the headquarters of the 7th remained in Karachi, so I suspect that some high ranking officer wanted to see what was going on. The aircraft we sent to Palestine were used

to interdict shipping in the Mediterranean that was supplying Rommel's forces. After the great allied victory at the El Aleman and after a number of other bomb groups were sent out to Africa, many of our aircraft were ordered back to Karachi. A few of the crews and aircraft were transferred to a bomb group in Africa and never came back.

Aircraft began to build up in Karachi and the unit began to prepare to move to the east where we would be nearer to Burma, which became one of our bombing targets for the remainder of the war. A couple of the squadrons, the 493rd and the 436th, were moved forward to the city of Allahabad. The 9th and the 492nd were scheduled to move to Gaya. Both of the cities were located on the old Grand Trunk Road which runs from Delhi to Calcutta. Kipling wrote a poem about "*...marching down the grand trunk road.*" It became time for the ground troops of the 7th to move out. Since I was a fugitive from the motor pool, I was assigned to drive one of the trucks to our new station.

To get our trucks and other service vehicles to Gaya, they were loaded on a train for that part of the journey from Karachi to Delhi (sometimes referred to as New Delhi). Driving between those two cities at that time was somewhat difficult, since the roads were not very good. We drove the trucks to the freight station in Karachi where they were driven up onto flat cars. There was one driver to each truck. We loaded our personnel baggage onto our truck and remained with it all the way to Delhi. The train pulled into a station occasionally and we were fed. Then, we slept in the truck at night. Each of the drivers was armed, so we served as guards as well as drivers. After a couple of days, we arrived in Delhi. We unloaded our trucks, and our convoy was driven to a motor pool where they remained for two nights. We were taken to a hotel that had been taken over by the Americans. There, we got a much needed shower, good food, and a couple of good night's sleep. We also spent a day seeing the sights of Delhi.

The Taj Mahal

The first leg of our journey out of Delhi was to Agra, the city in India where the Taj Mahal was located. The Taj Mahal was built by a ruler, Shah Jehan, as a mausoleum for his wife. It was a beautiful building of all white marble built on a foundation of marble with a tower at each of the four corners of the foundation. We visited the place, and as a good American tourist, I climbed one of the towers and left my name inscribed on the wall of the top floor. Looking down the reflecting pool toward the main building, it was the tower on the right.

The airport at Agra was being built to serve as the great supply and maintenance depot for the air forces in India. It remained so for the remainder of the war. Our convoy was parked and we slept there two nights. The following morning, we were off again to Allahabad. I don't remember how long it took to get there. I do remember spending one night on the road. We pulled off onto a sort of parking lot where fuel trucks came out and refueled our trucks. Then we circled up the wagons, ate some C-rations, posted guard, and slept in our trucks.

Allahabad had been a British station for many years, and there was a nice garrison there- beautiful barracks, a parade ground and all the trimmings. It would have been nice to

have been stationed there, but that was not to be. We drove on to Gaya. On arrival in Gaya, the word was out that we would soon move on to Pandaveswar, some distance on down the Grand Trunk Road. We remained at Gaya for a few days and I was successful in conning some poor soul into driving my truck. Then, I got myself assigned as a member of a ground crew on one of the airplanes. It was in Gaya that one of the crew chiefs died. He contracted a viral strain of malaria and died within two days. His last name was Miller and he was a fine fellow. He was well-educated, friendly, and an all around nice guy. He had married just before we left Salt Lake to a girl whose parents were very well off.

After the trucks left, the remaining ground crewmen were flown to the new station at Pandaveswar. That was my last assignment as a truck driver in my career in the Air Corps. The 9th and the 493rd squadrons were stationed at Pandaveswar most of the time for the rest of the war. The airport was a few miles to the north of the Grand Trunk Road, about 120 miles from Calcutta. We settled in for the long stay.

XIV

Pandaveswar

The field at Pandaveswar had a single runway which was probably a few hundred feet wide and six or seven thousand feet long. A series of revetments were under construction on both sides of this strip connected by taxi ways. A railroad track ran adjacent to the east end of the runway. At one time, a freight train, or a stores train in India, was left on the track. A B-24 was turning around at the end of the runway and its wing scraped the top of the train, making it one of the few times that an airplane ever ran into a train.

The 493rd was on the north side of the runway and the 9th was on the south side. The living quarters weren't bad. The air field was located near what had been at one time an iron mine. Both iron ore and coal were in the area, and, not surprisingly, there was a steel mill close by. About a couple of miles from the strip, a village had been built to accommodate the mine workers. These accommodations were refurbished as enlisted barracks, which were rather good. They were basically brick buildings with concrete floors and thatch roofs. Each building consisted of two rather large rooms, one on each end, and four enlisted men were assigned to each of the two rooms. Between the rooms were two porches, one facing each way. In their original form, the area was used for cooking on open fires. The rooms had four windows so that there was a bunk under each window. The windows had no glass panes, but did have shutters that could be closed when it rained.

The people who occupied one of those rooms were: Tom Peylock, the scion of a steel working family from Clairton, Pennsylvania; me, a farm boy from Manteca, California; last name Perry, a barber from Philadelphia; and Max Green, the son of a career master sergeant and the youngest member of our squadron, from Salt Lake City, Utah. Perry was not one of our gang, but Tom, Max, and I remained friends until Tom passed away a few years ago. Max and I still correspond with one another and have visited.

When we arrived in Pandaveswar, we did not have our full complement of aircraft. We had a half dozen B-24s and a couple of B-17s. I was assigned as crew chief on one of the B-17s. We began to fly regular combat missions with a mixture of B-17s and B-24s. Our group commander, Colonel Nicreaseon, flew one of the B-17s on a combat mission. When he returned, the aircraft was shot up rather badly and the Colonel was wounded. That aircraft was taken out of service and sent back to the depot. That left me as the crew chief of the only B-17 in the 7th Bomb Group. The plane was used to fly the brass from Headquarters around India and never again flew combat missions. I enjoyed that, since I went along as flight engineer. However, the joy did not last. Soon we were up to strength with a total of twelve B-24s. The last B-17 flew away into the wild blue yonder and I was assigned to crew a B-24.

The B-24s were assigned revetments and given a squadron number. We painted over all of the identification numbers that were on the tail of the aircraft when it arrive from the

States, and painted on a large squadron number. The number of my aircraft was 29. In my stay in India, I was crew chief of three aircraft, all numbered 29. We were assigned the revetment furthest away from the maintenance office, which was at the opposite end of the field. The ground crews moved between revetments, supply, the engineering office, and the barracks area by open 2½ ton trucks. The organization of the maintenance crews was as follows: Each plane had a crew with a crew chief. For each four aircraft, there was a flight chief, and he was given a jeep. Then, at the top, there was a line chief and an engineering officer, both of whom had their own transportation.

Operational missions had begun and we settled into a sort of routine. Every three or four days, a mission would be called, and, regardless of the hour, we loaded the bombs and prepared the aircraft for their mission. Before take-off time, we removed all the covers, started the engines, and performed a preflight inspection.

Immediately after each mission, the airplanes were refueled again, regardless of the hour. Scheduled maintenance was performed, and we would work off any discrepancies that had been written up by the flight crew. If there was major work to be done, changing an engine, or some equally major maintenance, the aircraft would be taken out of active status until the work was completed.

In the barracks area, an outdoor movie area was developed and we had movies on certain nights. We also developed an enlisted men's club, known as "The Cobra Club". Hard liquor could be purchased by the drink. We had a pretty good mess hall, which was developed from a large building of the coal mining days. Food, while being sort of repetitive, wasn't too bad. We had showers, which we built ourselves, but they had cold water only. In India, that wasn't a problem except about two months a year. Most of the year, the weather was so warm that cold showers were welcomed.

XV

The Bomber War in the CBI (China, Burma, India)

Aircraft

When I was taken off of the B-17, the first B-24 to which I was assigned as crew chief was a B-24D named "The Lone Wolf", squadron number 29. It had a wolf's head painted on the nose with the words "The Lone Wolf" beside it. There were civilian contractors working in the field who understood other languages and soon the name was painted on the nose in other languages, Chinese, Burmese, and Hindustani, in addition to English. It was a good airplane that stayed with us for some time, flying over fifty combat missions. When it was replaced and flown back to the states, the plane was eventually assigned to Las Vegas as a training aircraft.

When I returned to the States, because of my experience with B-24s, I was assigned to a B-24 training base at Las Vegas, Nevada. Lo and behold, there it was. The paint had been stripped off, and the wolf was missing, but they had retained the number of bombs under the pilot's window. A bomb was stenciled on the plane every time it completed a combat mission. The aircraft number was 41-11757; I'll never forget that number. I think it had flown around 57 combat missions.

The second B-24 I crewed was also squadron number 29. It was a "J" model. The difference between a "J" and a "D" was that the "J" had a nose turret. When it arrived, it was painted with the figure of a woman lying on her back, almost on her shoulders with her legs straight up. It flew a few combat missions and the crews didn't like it. They claimed that it could not be trimmed properly. It flew a bit lopsided.

The third B-24 for our ground crew was another "J" model. Max Green painted a nude woman on the nose. It had no name while I was crew chief of the airplane. The figure was lying down on her stomach with her head turned toward the viewer. It was another good aircraft that stayed in the squadron until the end of the war. Later, after I left the airplane, another crew chief took over and painted the words "Hot to go" above the lady.

Combat

The first real raid of any consequence carried out by the 7th Bomb Group was the raid on the Linzi mines, coal mines in Northern China, located in Japanese-occupied China. The aircraft took off from India, flew into China, refueled, loaded their bombs, and took off again to bomb the mines. The coal from these mines furnished fuel to some rather large electrical

generators. Industry in that part of China, which, among others, was a large steel mill, all were put out of action for some time.

Summer of 1943

The group was up and ready to assume a full combat role in the summer of 1943. Regular missions were flown and the crews, both combat crews and ground crews, were becoming accustomed to the schedule we were keeping. At first the bomb crews met little opposition on their raids into Burma. Combat crews in the European Theatre were rotated after twenty-five missions. The crews in the CBI Theatre (China, Burma, India), because of the lower loss rate, were expected to fly thirty-five missions, if and when replacements were available.

Thanksgiving Day of 1943 was a sad day for our squadron. An all-out mission was scheduled, with all available aircraft to be launched. Number 29 was filled with fuel and bombs and made ready for the mission. Take off was scheduled before dawn. The crew that was scheduled to fly number 29 had an upper turret gunner and flight engineer named Hudak who was a friend of my roommate, Peylock.

All aircraft were to take off to the west. The aircraft were loaded for a max effort, and were at their maximum gross weight. They all came waddling out of their revetments and proceeded to the east end of the runway for a take off to the west. At the west end of the runway, there was a swale so that the ground dropped away from the aircraft as it became airborne. About a mile away, at the other side of the swale, there was a small rise. Taking off in the dark, the first aircraft flew directly across the swale and hit the other bank. The aircraft was destroyed, caught fire, and all hands were lost.

Since it was to be a max effort mission, and the wind was not a serious consideration, it was decided that the aircraft would taxi to the other end of the runway and take off to the east. Number 29 was the first aircraft up. The pilot taxied into position, applied full power and began his takeoff roll. It is easy to imagine the thoughts on the pilot's mind. A burning aircraft was behind him and he was taking off in an airplane that had a reputation for not flying too well. He made it about three-quarters of the way down the runway and decided the aircraft was not going to become airborne; he chopped the throttles and applied full braking. It was too late, and the aircraft could not stop. The plane proceeded off the end of the runway, across the railroad track, broke up and caught fire. Had he continued, he would have become airborne, according to the ship's manual. Again, all hands were lost. I went immediately to the site of the crash where the airplane broke up. As I went over the railroad track, I saw the crushed body of Peylock's friend, Hudak, lying by the tracks.

That accident brought about some changes. A string of lights was strung along the top of the rise to the west and they were always on for night operations. At a much later time, Air Force regulations required that the pilots of large heavy aircraft be required to calculate take-off distance and stopping distance for the gross weight of the aircraft before attempting to take off. With those figures, the pilot would know that at a certain distance and airspeed he was committed to take off.

On one mission, something unique happened. A plane was shot down over Burma, and the crew bailed out. They had been warned that sometimes the Japanese pilots will fire on the people in their chutes. The co-pilot, Lt. Baggett, drew his 45-caliber pistol and had it in his hand, but he slumped over in his harness, as if he were dead. One of the fighters noticed him and came over to investigate. He slowed his aircraft almost to a stall and circled the parachute very close to the co-pilot. The co-pilot raised his weapon and fired four shots as fast as he could. The plane stalled and spun in. One of the Japanese guards at the prison camp later admitted that the pilot had been thrown clear of the aircraft when it hit the ground. He was found to have a bullet wound in his head. This is quite possibly the only instance in the entire war when an enemy fighter was shot down by a 45-caliber pistol.

In another instance in a raid on Japanese shipping, one airplane dropped a string of bombs that hit a ship and set it on fire. Another airplane bombing the same ship, had a bombardier named Lt. Sledge, who dropped a string of bombs that straddled the ship and put out the fire. The flight crew was not aware that the freighter was loaded with American prisoners of war, including a close boyhood friend of the second bombardier. Of course, they didn't know until some years later that the string of bombs had saved the life of his friend.

In 1943, the group began to lose aircraft. Some of the missions lost as much as one-third of their aircraft. There was another B-24 group that had been formed in China, the 308th, and we flew there in a combined raid into China and lost some aircraft. Moral in the units began to decline. We had been in operation for almost a year with no apparent change in the war situation. The combat crews began to feel the affect of their high loss rate, without any hopes of being rotated. Crews that were shot down were not being replaced.

In late 1943, we did begin to get replacement crews, and a rotation policy of combat crews became operational. We began getting replacements for the aircraft we lost. These things went a long way toward restoring some sense of pride in the organization. Late in 1943, most of the ground crews had been overseas for two years, and little did they realize that it would be more than a year, or even two years, before they were rotated. Considering what was happening in other theatres, they were beginning to feel a little put upon.

However, in a military organization of this kind, a group that had been together for a long time had gone through some rough times, camaraderie builds up that lasts for a lifetime. An organization called the 7th Bomb Group Historical Foundation was formed not too long after the war ended and still exists today. I am the current president of that organization.

China

Eastern India has two seasons, a wet season, referred to as the monsoon season, and a dry season. During the winter and spring, the weather is cool, relative to India, and there is little rain. By midsummer the monsoon winds begin to blow and the wet season begins. Warm moist air from the Bay of Bengal blows up over the land and drops its moisture over the eastern half of India and Burma. The aircraft of the 7th Bomb Group were equipped for visual bombing, and the weather prevented any accuracy in our bombing.

In the summer of 1943, it was decided that rather than flying bomber missions, the group would install sufficient fuel tanks in the bomb bay to bring the planes up to their gross weight carrying fuel alone. We then began to ferry fuel over the hump to China. The aircraft flew into a number of bases in China, depending on their needs, and then flew back to Kunming, the major transport base in Southern China, to get their tanks topped for their return trip home. Be aware that since the war, all of the Chinese towns have changed their names, or at least the spelling of their names, and the names used here could probably not be found on a modern map.

The squadrons were moved closer to China to shorten the distance the fuel had to be carried. Our squadron, the 9th, was moved to Kermatola, near Dacca, in what is now Bangladesh, then a part of India. As our missions increased, aircraft began to develop problems in China, and were stranded there for long periods of time awaiting repairs. Kunming was a transport base, and although they had mechanics, they were mainly trained in maintaining C-47 and C-46 aircraft. The commander determined that what was needed was a small detachment of our mechanics in Kunming to get the aircraft turned around and headed for home. I was selected to go and be in charge of the enlisted men.

Each squadron furnished one man, and there was one officer. A few days later, I packed my kit and took off in an aircraft piloted by James Barton, the pilot that was normally assigned to number 29, and flew to China. I had worked all night getting the aircraft ready to go. We installed tanks in the bomb bay, did an inspection of the engines, and changed a tire, so I took along a sleeping bag thinking I would get a little sleep en route. We took off and climbed out and headed toward our destination and I wandered off to sleep. Before long, I woke with a start; all the guns on the ship were firing. I just knew that we were going to be shot down. Actually, it was the gunners checking their guns, as is the custom when approaching enemy territory.

Kweilin to Kunming

We flew into Kweilin, (now Guiyang) which was pretty far to the east, from Kunming. The Japanese had it almost surrounded, and the fighter planes stationed there were doing their best to stave them off. It wasn't long before Kweilin fell to the Japanese. The U.S. and Chinese forces burned all the gasoline that we had worked so hard, and at great expense, to put there, before they evacuated. War is hell. At Kunming, they would calculate the amount of fuel necessary to return to their Indian bases, top off their tanks, and scurry back to their home bases. This practice proved to be dangerous. Unanticipated winds, storms over the Himalayas, and other unforeseen circumstances would cause them to run out of fuel.

I was impressed with the landscape between Kweilin and Kunming. In one area, the land was rather flat, but it had all these cone-shaped hills thrusting upward. They covered quite an area. I left the crew I was flying with in Kunming. We mechanics were taken to a cantonment some distance from the base, where we spent the first couple of days. We felt that this arrangement was undesirable, since it took us some time to get from our billets to the base. We had no place to leave our tools; and transportation to and from the base was by a bus. Our officer, whose name I have forgotten, had a tent pitched right out near where our

aircraft generally parked. He also managed to finagle a jeep for our transportation. However, we got into one little hassle with the jeep.

In China, all ground vehicles used a locally produced ethanol or something like that. The cars would hardly run on it, and they had little power; they wouldn't pull the hat off of your head. When we complained to one of the pilots, a couple of days later an airplane arrived with a P-51 belly tank hung up on the bomb rack full of good old motor fuel from India. Using the bomb racks, we lowered the tank onto the ground and located it near our tent. Then, we had it made - 250 gallons of regular gas for our jeep. Even the jeep rejoiced. When fueled up with the new fuel, it sprang into action. Several days later, one of the men took the jeep to the motor pool for some sort of service. A mechanic discovered the fuel we were using, reported it to some high official, and they came down on us like a ton of bricks. "You can't use that kind of fuel in China. Don't you know that all that fuel has to be flown over the hump?" After much hemming and hawing, and our explaining that we had had it flown over, we were reprimanded by some very officious Major, who later appeared at our tent with a truck and wench, and away went our fuel supply. I have often wondered who got to use that gas.

We remained in Kunming until the rainy season was over. Each day, we would meet each aircraft coming in, try to repair any gigs that the pilot had written up, and get them back home. Being on the airfield, we could also better protect the equipment we had, such as tool boxes, some replacement parts, and engine driven pumps that were used to move fuel about. The Chinese that were on the base, presumably to guard it, were from both the Chaing Kai-shek Republic army, and Mao Zedong Red Army. They would steal from one another, or from the Yankees. They were more interested in the war to come than they were about the current war with the Japanese. They knew the Yanks and the Brits could handle that one. One night we came home from the outdoor movie and found a bunch of Republican Army soldiers trying to make off with our pumps. Another time, I went to the laundry, got my clothes, and stopped at the mess hall, parking right in front. When I came out after eating, my clothes were gone.

Rescues

After a few days in Kunming, we got word that an airplane was down and some of the crewmen had reached a radio station some distance from Kunming. There was a whole network of radio stations scattered around China, some even behind Japanese lines. They would send messages to the central site in Kunming reporting Japanese activity, planes in the vicinity, and other such information. These radio stations were of great assistance in getting Doolittle raiders out of China.

The officer in charge of our little detachment asked me if I would go along with a truck and pick up the downed crew. I was ensconced in a standard 6x6 army truck with a Chinese driver, and away we went. After about fifty miles of dirt roads, we arrived in a small Chinese village. No one was to be seen, but the Chinese driver soon found that there was indeed a radio man in the village and he had company. We found the building he used, and there were three or four crewmen already there. More were on the way. They were flying with minimum crews of six or seven people. One of the pilots had hurt his back on landing,

but the rest were okay. We rigged up a sort of hammock in the back of the truck to ease the pain of injured pilot, since the roads were terrible. We headed back to Kunming.

The life of the radio man who manned the site was interesting. He was all by himself in this little Chinese village, some distance from any other U.S. military base. He had to report in at certain times, and stand by at other times. Behind the building was a large open space. At certain times of the day, he would have all the little children join him in the space and have physical training. They were intrigued by the radio and he explained it to them, in what Chinese he had acquired. He ran a little school where he taught English. All of his supplies were delivered by truck, including a lot of first aid equipment, and with that material, he also became sort of the village doctor. I was amazed at this man. If all of the Americans had behaved like him, we wouldn't have had the reputation of the "ugly American."

When I got back to Kunming, I learned that another aircraft had gone down near Kunming. The crew had bailed out, and among them was my old buddy Rightbower, formerly the supply sergeant. He had decided to drop out of administration and become a gunner on a combat crew. Rightbower knew his stuff about being an aircraft gunner. He did this for two reasons; (a) the combat crews drew flying pay—an additional fifty percent of their base pay, and (b) there was a growing possibility of being rotated. He had a widowed mother, and allotted a high percentage of his pay to his mother. Rightbower had bailed out over the mountains south of the base and had been skinned up a bit; otherwise, he was in good shape. We had a long talk that night. He said that he felt that if he was going to be killed, it would have been that day. He felt that since God had saved him this time, he had great confidence that he would complete his missions and go home. I had to ponder that a bit. I wondered how his faith stood up against the statistical probability of having another accident.

Formation Flying

Back at the home base in India, the Group Commander felt that because the planes were flying as single ships on gas carrying missions, the crews were losing their proficiency in formation flying. He decided that the planes would practice formation flying during their gas hauling trips. The technique of getting two aircraft into formation, as soon as possible after takeoff, was something like this: The first aircraft takes off flying straight ahead for a few minutes and then begins a slow climbing turn to the right, although a left turn would do as well. The next plane takes off and begins a turn soon after take-off and turns inside of the first plane. By turning inside, the second plane would have a shorter distance to travel as the two planes converged, and joined up in formation.

One morning, two aircraft were to take off, join up and fly formation on the way to China. The first plane took off and flew a normal pattern to the right. The second aircraft was delayed getting off, and the pilot recognized that he would have to turn rather quickly to catch the preceding plane. He got off, cleaned up as quickly as possible, that is he got the gear and flaps up, and started a rather steep climbing turn to the right. His turn was too steep for his airspeed and gross weight. The aircraft stalled and from that altitude the pilot had no chance of recovery. The aircraft crashed into a swamp at the east end of the field. Among the

members of the crew was my old friend Rightbower. Since I was in China when the accident occurred, I learned about the crash when the other planes arrived in China.

Kermatola

After about three months in China, the monsoon was beginning to fade, and regular bombing could be resumed. We got our gear together, hopped into an aircraft headed for India and flew back to Kermatola. The 9th squadron stayed there for a while longer and then moved back to Pandaveswar. The unit had changed a bit; people had been moved around, and I never returned to the position of crew chief of aircraft number 29. Since another person had that job, I became a flight chief. The number of aircraft assigned to a squadron, usually about twelve, was divided into thirds, called flights, and a senior master sergeant was designated as flight chief of each flight. One of our flight chiefs had left for headquarters, and I was designated to take his place. You could tell who the flight chiefs were; each had his own jeep.

The mission of our group began to change. We were flying longer missions; Bangkok was one of the new targets. As spring approached, we also began to worry the Japanese about the railroad that ran from Bangkok, Thailand, to Moulmein, Burma. All of the sea lanes to Rangoon had been blocked and the railroad, at this stage of the war, was the primary life line to Japanese troops in Burma. The railroad ran north out of Bangkok up a valley where it was necessary to cross a number of streams and rivers, up over a range of mountains via the Three Pagoda Pass, and down to Moulmein. This city is located on a small bay near the mouth of the Irrawaddy River. Rangoon is a short distance up that river. A railroad connected the two. Moulmein was a town that Kipling made famous in his poem about:

*Neath an old Moulmein Pagoda
Looking eastward to the sea
There's a Burma girl a sittin'
And I know she waits for me...*

The railroad out of Bangkok was made famous by the movie, *Bridge over the River Kwai*. Our group tried to keep that railroad out of operation, including bombing all of the bridges along the route. The bridge in the movie was only one of the many along the rail line. It was true that the Japanese were using prison labor to try to keep the railroad operating. During this period, we made history by doing two things: (a) we flew the longest missions flown by B-24s in the entire war (b) we mounted forward firing guns on the noses of some of the B-24s and rigged sights so that the pilot could use the aircraft for strafing. No other B-24 outfit, of which I am aware, was rigged with fixed forward firing guns. The guns were mounted in pods on each side of the nose of the aircraft, and each package contained two fifty-caliber guns. The pilot was able to strafe with four guns. This arrangement was made solely for strafing trains along that famous railroad. The Japanese used thousands of prisoners - Australian, Yankee, Chinese and others - to try to keep the rail operating. They also placed the POW camps adjacent to the bridges, on either end, to make the bridges harder for the Yankees to bomb. Many of these prisoners died as a result of the hard work and little food.

About this time, in the autumn of 1944, we began to get replacements for our ground crews. They tried to devise a numerical process to determine who went first, taking into account time overseas, illnesses, marital circumstances, and others. All of the senior NCOs (non commissioned officers) had about the same number of points. One of the problems was, if the point system was used, all of the top sergeants on the flight line would be rotated in one fell swoop. A call was made for volunteers, asking for some of the senior sergeants to stay on for at least six months. My old high school buddy, Ernie Alexander was a tech sergeant, and he was promised a promotion to master sergeant. Volunteers were promised air travel home, rather than a month on a troop ship. Ernie volunteered, and I did, also. Of those selected for rotation, many had health problems, many were married, and others seemed to have better excuses than I had. They went home first. I wasn't hurting; and while I wanted to get home soon, it was no great burden to stay on for a while. I didn't feel that I was in any great danger, and I was in good health.

China, Again

Along in the fall of 1944, a plan was formulated to consolidate as many aircraft as possible in China for an all out bombing campaign on certain targets. A group of ground crew men were assembled to go with the group, to maintain the aircraft in China. I was again selected to go along as the top NCO for the mechanics. I think that the folks upstairs recognized that "Honk" Reed would volunteer for about anything. Honk was a nickname I picked up as we were going overseas. Again, I packed my kit, got on an airplane, and this time landed in Luliang, China. I have scoured many maps of China, but since all of the names have been changed, I can't find it. I only know that it was north and east of Kunming, and was situated on a high plateau, about seven thousand feet high. There were tents awaiting us, so I moved into a tent that was supposed to be for senior NCOs. I couldn't detect any difference between that tent and all the other tents.

Bronze Star

The aircraft would fly back to India for a refueling run. Then, we would remove the tanks. They would fly a combat mission, and the tanks were then reinstalled for another gas trip. For refueling the aircraft, there was a rather large tank on a small hill where we parked our aircraft. A series of pipes came down from the tank, some for pumping fuel up into the tank, and some for allowing the fuel to drain down and refuel the aircraft. The aircraft were refueled individually. They were taxied to the fuel sump by one of the pilots or were towed there by a tug, refueled, and then taken to their parking place. Naturally, this was all done at night so the ships would be ready for early morning take off. Many times the ground crews would work all night.

One night, "Bed-Check Charlie" came over. We had no anti-aircraft defenses to speak of, and no night fighters. (Periodically, the Japanese would send over some out-of-date aircraft, armed with some small bombs, and raid the base. Hence, the name, "Bed-Check Charlie" was born.) They did little harm, but were more of a nuisance than anything else. This night, we were working and had an aircraft sitting in the refueling position when the raid occurred. A small fire started near the pipelines that supplied the fuel. None of the enlisted men were authorized to taxi the aircraft.

Given the circumstances, I crawled into the airplane, started the two inboard engines and taxied the airplane away from the fuel dump. The taxi ways were lined with rather large rocks, painted white. In making a turn, I hit one of the rocks and ruined a tire; however, we had it replaced by morning, and the plane was ready to go. The fire was extinguished without endangering the fuel tank. One of the squadron officers found out about what happened, and wrote it up in grand style. He used words like, "Grave danger", and "honor to his organization", and all those good things. The outcome was I was awarded the Bronze Star, a rather low-ranking hero's medal.

The Stove

In China, we were in mountainous country, and the base had an elevation of around seven thousand feet. It was approaching Christmas and getting pretty cold. To heat the tents, we had something of local manufacture that looked like a ten-gallon can with a stove pipe going out of the top of the tent. We were given wood to burn in the stoves. Since that was not a very satisfactory heating arrangement, one of the crews going back to India was asked to see if some of the regular GI tent stoves could be brought back to us. A few days later an aircraft arrived with a number of stoves aboard. Since there weren't enough to go around, it was decided that they would be reserved for the officer's tents. In the tent where I stayed, there were three master sergeants. Because we took care of the aircraft and knew everything about them, we managed to sneak one of the stoves into our tent.

One morning, after working all night, I came back to the tent, cleaned up a bit, got something to eat and went to bed. The other two occupants had left for the flight line. Before too long, a very officious ground pounding (not a crew member) second lieutenant came into the tent, woke me up and started giving me a hard time about the stove. He told me to get dressed immediately, take down the stove, and return it to the supply room. I explained to the lieutenant that I had worked all night, and had just gotten to sleep, and that I wasn't in a very good mood. If he wanted the stove, he was going to have to get an order from some higher authority. He said that he would see about that and stomped out. I never heard another word about the stove, and we kept it for the rest of our stay in China. I'm sure that when the lieutenant approached our commander, he was told to bug out.

Orders for Home

Sometime in late January 1945, an aircraft came in from India. The pilot, who I knew, crawled out of the plane and greeted me with the news that Ernie and I were on orders to return to the states. The commander was standing there and he asked the pilot if he brought any orders with him. The pilot said he didn't have any orders; he only heard about it before he left that morning. Therefore, I was told to wait until we had a copy of the orders. I was getting a bit nervous when another airplane arrived a few days later with a set of orders. Again, I packed up and caught the next plane to India.

XVI

Home Going

I got back to Pandaveswar and found that Ernie had flown the coop. He had grown weary of waiting for me to get back from China, and had gone on ahead. He didn't know when I would get back. I got paid, cleared out my space, giving away much of my stuff. I kept just enough to get back to the States, packed that in a parachute bag, and I was ready to go. I don't remember why, but there was an airplane going to Calcutta, and I bummed a ride. We landed at Dum Dum airport where the Military Air Transport Command was stationed. That is where I had to check in to get a ticket to the States. I wasn't there very long - a day or two - before I was assigned to a flight bound for Karachi. While I was at Dum Dum, I ran into a guy, last name Schmidt, whom I had known in high school. His family lived near us and he was an ardent radio man with an amateur radio license. True to form, he was working as a military radio operator at Dum Dum. The airplane for Karachi took off in the morning, refueled at Agra, then landed in Karachi in the late afternoon.

When we arrived in Karachi, we were taken to tents for a brief stay while we were cleared out of the theatre. In the tents, I ran into Ernie. He had gotten in a day or two ahead of me, but had not cleared out yet. I went through clearance the next day, and my pay records were checked, clothing checked, shots checked, and a brief physical was performed. Once you were cleared, you were placed on a waiting list for transportation.

The next leg was to Cairo, Egypt. Ernie's name came up before mine and he left. A day later, my name came up and I left for Cairo. We landed for refueling and food in Abadan, Iran. In Egypt, we landed at what was then called the John Paine airport. The airport was named after a pilot out of our outfit who went out to the Middle East with the others at an earlier time, and stayed on there when the others came back to India. I don't know why they made such a hero out of the guy; it is my understanding that he got soused and drowned in his bath tub. The airport has now been renamed for King Farouk, and is the international airport for Cairo.

I saw my first WAC (Woman's Army Corps) in Cairo. We were hanging around the air terminal when I walked a woman in an Army uniform with Sergeant's stripes. She was armed with a forty-five pistol, and was carrying a brief case. We engaged her in conversation and she explained that she was working in the finance office, and was carrying money around, usually payrolls. I had left the States in 1939, before the WACs were organized, but it seemed strange for me to see my first one in Cairo, Egypt.

In Cairo, we ran into a road block. This was in January 1945, and the Battle of the Bulge was well underway. Much of the transport aircraft had been diverted to the European Theatre. We remained there about a week or ten days. If our name wasn't up on a list, we

could go off the base. One day we went into Cairo and looked around, and another day we toured the pyramids.

Casablanca

Ernie's name came up and he was off to Casablanca, Morocco. I stuck around a couple of days, and since my name never came up, I went to the office to inquire. I was told that my name had been published a day before. They had spelled it wrong and I didn't notice. I was scheduled out the next morning. The take-off from Cairo was beautiful. The sun was just right and the aircraft circled over the pyramids. However, from there, the flight to Casablanca was fraught with difficulties. We touched down in Benghazi, Tunis and Oran. First we had heater problems and about froze. Next, we landed for fuel and food, and in Oran we had some sort of engine problems. We didn't get into Casablanca until the next morning. On the way to Casablanca, when we stopped for food, we were taken to a mess hall operated by civilians. I was surprised to find white women working in the kitchen and serving the food. I hadn't seen many white women in a few years, and none doing those kinds of chores.

In Casablanca, we began to sweat a little bit. Because of the lack of airplanes, we were told that many of us would be sent home by ship. Surface transportation was available. After we had spent an extra six months on the promise of air transport home, we were not too happy. We found out, however, that a priority code was embedded in our orders for air transport. We had pretty high priority and it looked as if we would be accommodated. My only memory of Casablanca was that Ernie and I went downtown and into a bar. It was a rather high class bar and there were some women there. Ernie began to make passes at one of the women and a big French officer didn't take to kindly to that; he threatened to beat Ernie up. However, Ernie, being like he was, talked him out of it.

Another problem we faced in Casablanca was that we were told we might go into the States through New York. All we had was tropical kit, a cotton khaki shirt and trousers. From the time we left the States, we saw three summers in a row: summer in the States, went to Australia when summer was just starting, then moved on to Karachi to meet summer there. We spent three years in India. As Mark Twain aptly explained in his book *Innocence Abroad*, in India the summer heat will melt the brass door knobs, while in the winter they just get mushy. Now, we were faced with arriving in New York in the middle of the winter with only summer clothes to wear.

Miami

In a few days, Ernie was put on an airplane headed for Miami. He was lucky. Again, I had to wait a while, but eventually I, too, got a ticket to Miami. One thing happened as I checked in to fly home that I have always regretted. The inspection was very slipshod and I thought I could get anything I wanted through the inspection. In fact, I was wearing a leather jacket that was not supposed to be taken home, and a pistol was rolled up in my laundry. I got careless. I had kept a diary ever since I left the States, and had recorded just about everything that had happened regarding such things as aircraft shot down or anything out of the ordinary. In fact, I had written in it on almost a daily basis, and I had just written in it

before flying out. When I went to the counter to check my bag, I just dropped the diary right on top.

The inspector opened the bag and the first thing he saw was the diary. I was told that I could not take the diary home with me, but that he would take it, along with my name and address, and it would be mailed to me after the war was over. Yeah---right. I took the diary to a waste basket and tore it up. From Casablanca, we flew to Techara, Azores, and Hamilton, Bermuda, and then on to Miami. I have forgotten the exact date, but it was sometime in late February 1945. I had been overseas for three years and four months.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when we arrived in Miami. One other passenger and I were taken to a transit barracks, given blankets, sheets and a pillow and told to go to the building next door and make our beds. There were only two of us and there were already others in the barracks, so we were trying to be quiet. As I was making my bunk, I heard a voice say "Hey, Honk." It was Ernie. Even though it was in the early morning, Ernie got dressed and we walked over to the air terminal, where it was operating twenty four hours a day. I was able to find a milkshake, one of my favorite foods that I hadn't seen in many moons.

We stumbled onto a telegraph station, and I decided to send a telegram home telling my folks that I had arrived back in the States. I was worrying about how to word the telegram. I was trying to decide whether to write, "I am in the States", "I am on the East Coast", or whatever when the telegraph operator asked me why I didn't just say that I was in Miami. I was surprised and asked, "Can I do that?" For three and one-half years, we could never say where we were exactly. In writing home, we would say that we were in the Far East, or India, for example, but never any more specific than that.

To California by Train

The next morning, I began my processing. Again, our pay records were checked, and we were issued clothing. Transportation home was provided, and we were given a thirty-day leave with orders to report to a reassignment center in Santa Ana, California. Ernie had already gotten his train ticket home, but we found a sympathetic fellow in the transportation office who changed Ernie's ticket so we could go home together - only the best for the boys returning from overseas.

We shared a first-class compartment all the way to San Francisco. We left Miami for Chicago and the further north we went, the colder it became. After three years in the tropics, we weren't used to cold weather. I think we were in Nashville when a carload of WACs were coupled up in a car just behind us. We sort of perked up, but to no avail. They were well guarded with MPs guarding all portals, which we thought was sort of strange. We were all adults, and I'm not sure what crimes could be committed in a railroad train. Military personnel were fed first and we did share a meal with them. It seems they were a bunch of recruits heading to some camp for training.

There used to be a saying that cattle could be shipped cross country in the same car, but people had to change trains in Chicago. Not only did you have to change trains, but we

also had to change train stations. I remember how cold it was getting outside to get a cab. We boarded another train and headed west. It was good to travel across the great Midwest and on into the mountains of the west. Although you can get a railroad ticket to San Francisco, no train ever crossed the San Francisco Bay. You had to disembark in Oakland, take a bus to the ferry, and then take a ferry across the bay.

Ernie's folks had moved to Oakland, so we bailed out in Oakland and went to his parents' house. There was some sort of automobile in the garage that hadn't gotten much use, because of the ration on fuel. We got it cranked up and Ernie took me to the bus station. By this time it was getting along toward noon. At the bus station, I couldn't get a ticket to Manteca until the next morning; however, I could get a ticket to Tracy that afternoon. Tracy is a town about eight or ten miles west of Manteca. I arrived in Tracy at about seven o'clock in the evening, and being winter, it was dark. To get to Manteca, I decided to hitchhike, which was an acceptable mode of transportation in those days. I caught a ride rather quickly and the fellow dropped me off in downtown Manteca. I walked to my sister Tava's house. The lights were on, and people were still awake. My parents lived only a couple of houses from my sister. They were roused out of bed and we all talked well into the night.