

## XVII

### Stateside Duty

After the festivities of my returning home were over, I found that there wasn't a lot to do for the thirty-day leave. I had been away from Manteca for almost six years and most of the guys with whom I ran around were in the service. I visited each of my relatives in turn. My sister, Vivian, who lived in Indiana, had moved to California with her two daughters. The oldest daughter, Maurie, was married to a sailor stationed in California, and the youngest daughter, Roberta was single and working in defense work somewhere. There was an older brother, Payton, who had lived with us in California during the last two years he was in high school, but, he too was in the service. It's hard to believe we had over eleven million men and women in the service at that time. Today, with the Iraqi war on, we scream about sending an additional 100,000 to fight the war on terror.

Ernie came down from Oakland and spent a little time in Manteca, since he also graduated from Manteca High. We had one little fracas while he was in town. We put on civilian clothes, which was against the rules during the war, and went to Stockton. We were doing a little bar hopping when we were approached by two burley MPs who demanded our identification. If we showed them our IDs, we would be picked up for being out of uniform. We bluffed our way through by saying that we were civilians and they had no authority over us.

While I was overseas, I allocated most of my pay to an account in Ripon, so when I got home, there was a pretty good nest egg saved up. My parents had a small house in Manteca that they had been paying on for years, so I took the savings I had and paid it off. I went to the mortgage company and got the title, and took it to the court house in Stockton to get the title recorded. Mom never forgot about the payment I made. I was appointed as the executor of her will, where she specified that I be repaid the amount that I had paid, before her estate was to be divided.

In California, there were a number of immigrants from India. While at the court house, a deputy sheriff brought one of them in for some infraction, and told him to sit on a bench in the hall. While my business was being transacted, there was a little commotion regarding the Indian. He was probably a Sikh, I think. The Indian was trying to get up and the deputy kept pushing him down. Since I was fresh out of India, I finally went over and explained to the deputy that what he was saying was that he wanted to go to the toilet.

After thirty days of lying around, I took a bus for Santa Anna to report for reassignment. An Army airbase, across the road from the El Toro Marine Air Station, was the processing station. Southern California wasn't bad and the processing took a bit of time. Again, we were checked for everything - clothing, health, pay, etc. After our processing was completed, we were told to report in at least once a day to see if we had received an

assignment. Ernie and I hung around the beach at Newport. At that time, Newport and Balboa Island were only weekend places. The houses were mostly small and inexpensive at that time (Price one today!). We also made a couple of trips in to L.A. One night we went to the big USO dance in L.A.

Soon we got our assignments. Ernie was assigned to the airbase in Victorville, California, and I was assigned to the airbase in Las Vegas, Nevada. Las Vegas was a B-24 training base. They checked out pilots, and trained the gunners in air-to-ground gunnery. They had a bunch of war weary B-24s, most of which had served a tour overseas. My old airplane, "The Lone Wolf" was there. It had been worked on and the paint was removed. The wolf's head was no longer on the nose, but they had kept the number of bombing missions stenciled on the side, maybe adding a few. The old serial number, 41-11757, was repainted on the tail, a number that I'll remember for life.

I was assigned a position as a maintenance inspector. When work had been done on an aircraft, it had to be checked by an inspector before it could be returned to flight status, which also meant that I lay around a lot. I was also put on flying pay, so I had to fly at least four hours a month to collect my flying pay. Using some of that easily earned *dinero*, I bought a car. It was the latest model on the market, a 1941 Plymouth, since they quit manufacturing cars during the war. It had belonged to a master sergeant who burned up the engine returning from L.A. I found that the local Dodge dealer had some Army-reject engines that were new. The reason for which they were rejected had nothing to do with their use in an automobile. Furthermore, they would fit in a Plymouth, so the deal was made.

In assigning billets at Las Vegas, I stayed in one of the regular barracks of the period. Those old WWII barracks were turned out in gross lots and each base had a number of them. There was an upstairs and downstairs, with open bays, and a communal bathroom downstairs. There were also about four rooms in each barracks, used by one or two men, and the highest ranking NCOs were assigned to those rooms. It was about the first of May one day, when I came back to the barracks for something. I noted that there were a lot of men in the barracks, probably the night shift, and went into my room. Suddenly the men in the regular bay began to shout and jump up and down. I went out into the bay to see what all the noise was about. There was a radio on in the bay, and one of the airmen announced that the war in Europe was over.

The summer wore on. I spent a bit of time in the gambling joints, but not gambling a lot. Las Vegas was a different place then. There were two casinos on the "strip" - The El Rancho and Rancho Vegas; and one downtown - The Frontier. At that time, the floor show was free. There was even a room where one could get a free meal.

An old friend of mine, Hitchcock, was called "Modu Sahab," which in Hindi meant "Bald-Headed Man". He had been in the same recruit squadron with me at Hamilton Field and the same outfit in India. Now, we were also stationed together at Las Vegas. He was a short little guy from Arena, a small town in California, south of Merced. Hitchcock was a nice guy, liked by everyone who knew him.

One Saturday afternoon, Hitchcock and I, along with a couple of other fellows, decided to go into town, have dinner, get a few drinks and return to base. I was running low on clothes, so I had purchased a new shirt in the PX that afternoon and was wearing it into town. It had no stripes, insignia or anything else on it. We had just arrived in town, parked the car on the main drag, and since there was a bar adjacent to the parking area, we decided to go in for one drink before dinner. We finished our one drink, and walked out to go to the restaurant next door. We wore a small cloth cap (the name we called it is unprintable), which we took off indoors and stuck under our belt.

As we exited the bar, a couple of MPs accosted Hitchcock and told him to get his hat on; naturally, they picked on the smallest of the group. I took exception to their actions and told them so. Since I didn't have my stripes on, they latched on to me. Naturally, they weren't going to take any lip from me, and placed me under arrest. They escorted me to the local lockup and on the way they took me up an ally and beat me up pretty bad. They threw me in the clink where I stayed all night. Hitchcock came in to try to get my keys so he could get my car off the street and they threw him out. I was reminded of the beating that Prewitt, in the book *From Here to Eternity*, received at the hands of the MPs.

The next morning, after another bit of abuse, they turned me loose, and to add insult to injury, my car had a parking ticket on it. The day was Sunday, and I just lay around. The next morning I went in to see the squadron commander, explained what happened, and asked permission to see the base commander. About noon, I was called to report to the base commander. He already had received a report from the MPs and he wanted to hear my side of the story. I told him that I had been treated pretty badly. He told me that the MPs had been reprimanded and were being transferred to the prison at Fort Leavenworth to be prison guards. He also explained that all of the MPs had my name and would be laying for me; he said that he had a request to send a number of mechanics to Fairfield, California, and asked me if I would like to go. I thought that would be mighty fine.

## XVIII

### Travis Air Force Base

I checked out of Las Vegas, collected my gas stamps, and proceeded to the airbase at Fairfield-Suisun. A fellow who had been with us in India, P.K. Miller, was also transferred to Fairfield, and he came with me. On the way, we stopped off to see Ernie in Victorville. Ernie took us to a bar-restaurant named the Green something, the Green Hornet, I think. We went in and Ernie introduced us to a waitress he was going with. She was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. Her name was Alma Lee Upton, and she was from somewhere in South Carolina. Ernie married her later, and they had a rough row to hoe until Ernie died. You'll read more about this later.

The base at Fairfield was later named Travis Air Force Base after a Colonel that was killed in a B-29 crash. He was attempting to land a B-29 that had a loss of power, and couldn't make the base. The Colonel landed short, killing all hands. I had barely arrived when I was summoned to the base commander's office. He had been in correspondence with the commander at Las Vegas and had talked to him about the fracas with the MPs. He said that the Las Vegas commander had exonerated me from any blame and the affair had served to expose the manner in which the MPs had treated the airmen in Las Vegas. However, when I rose to leave his office, he asked me if I didn't have a little Irish temper to go with my red hair. I admitted that I probably did. He told me to keep out of trouble and that nothing would be put on my record concerning the event. I thanked him kindly, saluted, about-faced, and departed.

The first assignment at Fairfield was to become acquainted with the C-54, the airplane that was in use at the base. Fairfield was being used by MATS, (the Military Air Transport Service), and was the western hub of the Pacific Division. The course we were to take was about six weeks long and we were taught the systems on the C-54 and how they were to be maintained. All the information on the C-54 would come in handy later. I didn't stay at Fairfield too long. Even though the war in the Pacific was not over, the military had begun to discharge men that had been in the service a long time and had served in combat zones, etc.

Again, they came out with a point system, and because of my long service overseas, when my points were calculated, I had more than enough to qualify for discharge. As an incentive, we were offered a ninety-day furlough in addition to any accumulated leave we had. I had not decided at that point whether to stay in or get out. Counting accumulated leave, I would have about five months to make up my mind.

While at Travis, I became good friends with P.K. Miller, the fellow who rode to Travis with me from Vegas. He was a good guy to know since he had a brother back in North Dakota that was in the trucking business. He could get "T" tickets for gas. At that time, all

gas was rationed. There were various grades of tickets. First, there was the "A" ticket - the minimum amount one could get. If you owned a car, you got so many "A" tickets. In addition, there was the "C" ticket. If it was necessary for you to use your car for business or other commercial purposes, you could apply for "C" tickets. Trucks were given "T" tickets. All of these were supposed to be kept in the booklets in which they were issued, but, as a matter of fact, the service stations couldn't care less about where or how the tickets were received. Anyway, P.K. had a lot of "T" tickets and we could run around.

One Saturday night, P.K. and I decided to go into Sacramento to a big dance that was being held at the municipal auditorium. At the dance, we met a couple of young ladies, Zellie Dadigan and Frannie Zurfluh; they lived together in an apartment in Sacramento. After the dance, we took them to an all-night diner, and later took them home.

### End of the War

Ernie, Alma, Frannie, and I, along with another couple, were in San Francisco the day the war in the Pacific ended on September 2, 1945. What a raucous night that turned out to be. Market Street was packed with people singing and dancing. The street was blocked off and was taken over by the revelers. Finally, the three couples of us managed to get to Ernie's car and sneak out of town. We all lived on the other side of the bay.

The regulation on being discharged was swung wide open and most of the people were accepting the offer. The regular soldiers were leaving the service in droves. The war was over, and the military was no longer needed. Each of the services could see that if there was to be a regular service, some commitment by older NCOs and officers was mandatory. Offers were being made to entice some of the seasoned officers and men to remain in the service. The long leave that I had received from the Army for discharge was running out. Did I want to spend a career in the military, or did I want to get out and make something of myself outside?

As bonuses for reenlistment, the Army was offering ninety-day furloughs, choice of stations, and other inducements. Again, Ernie and I decided that maybe it would be nice to retire from the service after twenty years of service. We already had about seven years, so we headed off to the recruiting office in San Francisco and reenlisted. We requested that we be stationed at March Field, which is near Riverside, California. About this time our old friend, Tom Paylock, showed up in California. He had reenlisted for Hamilton Field, California. When he found that Ernie and I had reenlisted for March Field, he went to an Army headquarters in San Francisco to request that his orders be amended to March Field. The change was made.

### Marriage

Frannie was a beautiful young lady, only 18 years old when we met. We fell madly in love. Her mother and father lived close by and we met and got along very well. Her father was a retired bus driver, in poor health, and didn't live very long. Her mother, who we all called Grandma Zurf, lived long enough to see her grandchildren grow up. She died in her sleep well along in her eighties. Frannie had two sisters and a brother. The oldest sister,

Madeline, was married to a Nick Tomich, an architect, with whom I became a close friend. Her sister Mary and I liked to argue politics. Her brother lived in a town some distance from Sacramento, and I never got to know him very well.

Frannie and I were married in a small Catholic church in Fair Oaks, California, a suburb of Sacramento, on September 9, 1945. Only the immediate family on both sides attended, along with a few close friends. In order to marry in a Catholic church, I had to take instructions in the Catholic Church. For many years after that, on those occasions when I did go to church, I went to the Catholic Church. Our children were all baptized Catholic.

I was on a ninety-day leave from the service, so we took a long honeymoon trip, spending the first two nights at Lake Tahoe. We then drove all the way from Sacramento to Indianapolis, stopping in Missouri to visit relatives. Frannie and I certainly became better acquainted on the trip and learned a lot more about one another. We decided that we had a good marriage that would last. Frannie and I were married almost thirty years.

When we returned from our honeymoon, we needed to settle down somewhere. I had an offer of a job as an aircraft mechanic by Matson Navigation Company. Ernie Alexander was also on leave and was working for the same company. Matson Navigation was a shipping company out of San Francisco that hoped to get into the airline business when the war was over. The job was at the Oakland Airport, but since I was still in the service, we were able to get government housing in Alameda. It was pretty sad housing, but since we were going to be there only a short time, we got along okay.



*My marriage to Frances E. Zurfluh*