Wartime Chronicle

An American Family Saga

1941 - 1946

The Narrative.

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April 15, 2015

Contents

Note:

Here's just the narrative of McFerren's story. It's the structure for the screenplay. His and his wife's letters and the original taped transcripts can add additional dialogue, detail and color to the film.

Early Army Days

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, I was 24 years old and a 1937 graduate of Yale University. I was working in the research department of the American Can Company in Chicago studying ways to prevent the spoilage of canned goods. My connection with the food business was part of my heritage. I grew up in the small Illinois town of Hoopeston, about 100 miles south of Chicago, where my family had interests in farming and canning businesses.

By 1941, with an escalating United States involvement in the European war, Howard Hamilton, one of the American Can executives I knew was transferred to Washington, D.C. to take charge of grading canned goods for military procurement programs. He invited me to join his staff, but because of some obscure regulation, he said I had to be in the military service to get the particular job he offered.

Since my father and uncle had answered their country's call to duty in the First World War, I could do no less, and agreed to join the Army. Also, since I then found life in Chicago a bit dull, the prospect of eventually being transferred to Washington, which was blossoming with eligible single women, was another reason I agreed to join the service in July 1941. I volunteered for the Army's Quartermaster Corps. The plan was that as a college graduate, I would be sent to officer's candidate school after some basic training, then transfer to Washington for what I thought would also be a great social life. That plan went awry in Wyoming.

After basic training, they sent me to Fort Warren, an old calvary post at Cheyenne, Wyoming, that was taken over by the Quartermaster Corps. Compared to Chicago, Cheyenne was a social desert, a small windy and dusty capitol city of a state where the entire population was only 250,000 people in 1941.

The first week there, they assigned me to a course for cooks and bakers, and during one class the instructor was talking about 'veetamins.' His mispronunciation suggested he didn't really know too much about nutrition. I questioned him on one point where I felt sure he was wrong, and he put me on the spot by asking, "Well, Private McFerren, where did you get all this information about nutrition." So I explained about my background with the can company, and the issue in question, and he agreed that I was qualified to speak to the subject.

Then, a voice from the back of the class echoed, "Yes, he's damned well qualified!" There was a major who had been listening to the presentation. He approached me afterward and asked "How would you like to be an instructor?"

Puzzled, I asked, “For what?” “You could take that guy’s job.” I hesitated and replied that I would hate to take anyone’s job from them. The major quickly advised me, “Listen, you got to look after yourself,” uncannily repeating the admonition of my father who once said the same thing. So, I became a nutrition instructor, promoted to sergeant, and got a pay boost to $60 a month instead of the $20 I received as a private.

I also connected with the social life of Cheyenne. Chance had it that I was able to help the daughter of the base commander when she suffered a spill while horse riding. We became acquainted, to her father’s chagrin, and she introduced me around town.

By December 1941, I was working in the officer’s mess on the base. On Sunday, December 7th, sometime before noon mountain time, I heard the radio report that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, and a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach made me wonder what impact that would have for me. The following Saturday, when I went down to the Plains Hotel in Cheyenne to have a beer, I found the answer to that question.

In the bar, I sat next to an army captain and we started talking. Seeing that he was in the Air Corps, I told him I grew up near Chanute Field in Illinois, an Air Corps training base started in the 1920s. Air Corps officers frequently visited our house, and my family and I got to know many of them over a period of years, including a Captain W. Cushman Farnum. ‘Cush’ and his wife Louise, became a big part of my life, and my war story. When the captain learned I graduated from Yale, he offered, “I’m with the Air Corps’ travelling recruitment board. Would you be interested in going into the Air Corps?” “Well,” I said, “I’d do just about anything to get out of Cheyenne, I’m freezing my ass off here.”

Satisfied that he probably found another flyboy, he diverted the conversation to a more pressing concern. “Tell me, you know any nice girls here in Cheyenne?” “Yeah,” I said, “I know a great girl, her father is a prominent lawyer, and she happens to have a friend who is very attractive.” He said, “Why don’t you line them up, and we’ll take them out dancing?” I said, “To be honest with you, I only have about three dollars on me.” “Don’t worry about the money, I just got paid, contact those girls!,” he insisted. I called, and the ladies agreed to go out dancing. In fact, they invited us out to the local country club which was having a dance. We had a great time, and wound up taking them home about two in the morning.

After we dropped them off, he said, “I’m serious about the Air Corps, with your education, you’d be a great pilot. Have you ever flown a plane?” I said, “I was once up in a Stearman owned by one of my Yale classmates and he let me take the controls.” “Great,” he said, “But, I need to give you a preliminary physical.” After our evening of drinking and revelry, we went down to his office, and he gave me a physical at two in the morning. Under the circumstances, I passed only by the vigor of youth. After the exam, he said, “I’m going to Omaha, Nebraska, I’ll take your papers with me and you’ll hear from me within a week. Right now the Air Corps has a priority call for anyone they want no matter what branch of the service they’re in.”

A week later a wire came in from Omaha ordering me to report to Minter Field, at Bakersfield, California, for air cadet training. I reported there in February 1942 after 30 days home leave.

Air Corps Training, Courtship, and Marriage

Minter Field turned out to be just few weeks stay for orientation and preliminary cadet training. I then transferred to the Santa Ana Army Air Base for ground school. I arrived there about the time the California coast panicked when it was said a Japanese submarine surfaced and fired on Santa Barbara, a coastal town north of Los Angeles. After ground school of a few weeks, flight training followed at Visalia Dinuba Air Base near Fresno.

There, after six hours of flight instruction, I made a check flight, and got washed out of pilot training. One problem was that the check pilot was out of touch with the instructors and asked me to make maneuvers I was never taught. I later found out that the entire group of instructors and their training methods were terrible. Shortly after I washed out, a general heard about the situation, ordered the curriculum revamped, and replaced most of the flight instructors.

The check pilot who washed me out was known there as ‘one way Porter.’ He also washed out most others in the class. However, it turned out, my problem was more than poor instructors. It was depth perception. Porter told me, “You’re a smart guy, you have potential, I think your instructors did bad by you - but all that aside, you’ve got a problem in depth perception.” I replied that I knew I had a problem, but didn’t think it was that bad. He told me, “It wasn’t too bad for regular flying, but it would be terrible for formation flying where you have to fly wingtip-to-wingtip. You’d be a

dangerous pilot. I can get you through primary instruction easily enough, but they'd knock you out later in advanced training." As disappointing as this was, fortunately in school, mathematics was my strong suit and I was able to transfer from pilot to navigator training back at Santa Ana.

During our training there, we cadets could get weekend passes and go as far as our $75 a month pay could take us. Nearby Los Angeles was the logical choice. We'd get off Saturday afternoon and have to be back by Sunday evening. The first thing we did in Los Angeles was look for a place to stay, and the second thing was to look for girls. We found a $5 suite in a small hotel across the street from the exclusive Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Boulevard where it would have cost twenty times that.

One weekend, with two cadets who already had dates, I was odd man out. I told the others I was going to pick up the first good-looking girl who came down the street. Everyone started betting that I would strike out. It wasn't long before a real good-looking gal came along, so I stopped her saying something like, "Pardon me miss, could you give me some information?"

Then, a military uniform was a badge of honor, and she stopped saying, "Sure, if I can." I said, "Could you tell me where I could find a nice looking girl who would like to go out and have a good time tonight?" Taken aback she said, "Well . . ." I quickly added, "Like you!" "You mean you want me?", she asked. I introduced myself, told her I was Yale graduate, and otherwise gave her a good line. She smiled, saying, "Sounds like we'd have fun." We crossed Wilshire Boulevard to the posh Ambassador and I bought drinks.

While chatting, told her I had more liquor in our rooms across the street. After drinking and talking a bit longer, she said, "Mind if I ask you a personal question?" I said, "Sure, what is it?" She said, "Could I have another drink here before we go to bed?"

This time I was taken aback, mustering an understated, "Well, that sounds reasonable to me." So that was that, and we spent time together over the next three weekends. Then I found out she was getting serious and I wasn't.

The next weekend, I asked Horace "Goldie" Lund, my barracks roommate, "How would you like to go to Laguna Beach instead of Los Angeles?" He agreed, and we went down to Laguna and managed to meet two nurses in a bowling alley. We wagered our games, and my team lost so we owed them a drink. Then, if you were a serviceman, you couldn't buy a drink until it was six in the evening. It was then only about 4:30pm. My pretty partner said, "Look, I've got a house near here with some liquor."

So we went back to her place, had some drinks, and were getting along great when she asked, "By the way, where are you boys staying?" I said, "Don't know, we've got to find a place." She offered, "Well, if you want to stay here, I've got an extra bedroom downstairs." Goldie and I agreed the Gods were smiling on us.

As evening approached she said, "I've got a slight problem. I work for a wealthy patient and I've got to attend to him every evening," adding, "But why don't you boys go down to the beach, have dinner, and meet us afterwards?" So I asked where, and she said, "Go to a place called Las Ondas, it serves seafood out by the beach."

Dutifully, Goldie and I went there and a waitress came to our table who turned out to be Betty Garvey, who was to become my wife. I was immediately taken by her sparkling eyes and presence, and to get a conversation going asked, "What do you recommend here, the french fried shrimp or the shrimp creole?" She said, "I don't particularly care for shrimp, so I can't honestly tell you, but I'm sure they're both excellent."

Looking for a further opportunity, I noticed her ring with its large blue-green stone. I remembered hearing a similar stone called a turquoise. I took a chance and said, "Say, that's a beautiful turquoise, I love them and have a collection of over 200 of them." She brightened and said, "No kidding?" It was a bald-faced lie, but I went on, "They're wonderful stones, I've several books on them." Apparently I'd struck the right chord and I noticed a mutual interest developing during the meal.

As she served dessert, I asked, "Do you have a date tonight, I'd like to take you out." She answered, "I can't, unfortunately, I already have a date." I had this other gal lined up, but something was happening between us that made Betty the more important to me.

After dinner, as Goldie left for his date, I moved to Los Ondas's bar to wait things out. Some time passed and I noticed another cadet came in looking vaguely around, and I correctly guessed he was her date. I asked him if he had a date with the waitress with the white shoes on, and he said he did. I gave him a line, saying, "I'm an old friend of hers, just flew in from Luke Field in Phoenix to see her, but apparently we got our signals crossed as she seems obligated this evening." He said, "Well, I won't stand in the way of an old friendship, be my guest."

That settled, I waited at the bar until she was through work. When she came out and asked, 'Where's my date?' I told her, 'I sent him packing.' She snapped, "You've got a lot of damned nerve!" I said, "I'll surprise you with how much nerve I've got!" She surveyed the situation for a moment, and after adding things up as only she can, said, "Well, I guess I'm stuck with you." I said, "Do you like to dance?" She conceded that she did and suggested a place nearby called The Broiler. We went there and danced all night until they closed the place. During the evening, Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine" became 'our song.' I brashly told the musicians that every time they played it, I'd buy them a drink. They played it seven times, I ran out of money, and had to admit that embarrassing fact to Betty. She volunteered, "Don't worry, tips were good, I have some money." Thus, that memorable evening when I first met my wife, I borrowed money from her.

I walked her back to a girlfriend's place where she was staying. We necked for awhile, and I tried to coax her down to the beach with a blanket. Although she was warming up, she'd have none of that. So I offered to meet her for breakfast in the morning. I thought I'd have a bit more luck with her then, but I figured wrong. When I went by her place she introduced me to her girlfriend's daughter. It was charming, but not exactly what I had in mind.

However, there was some magic between us and we were becoming fast friends. I suggested she visit me at the base when she had an opportunity, but I forget that they didn't allow access to civilians after security tightened up all along west coast. We arranged a date on the base for the next day, and she shows up and is refused entry. Completely exasperated, out of 3,000 men on the base, she runs into my roommate Goldie who was walking out the gate and equally surprised to see her. He told her I had given up after waiting over an hour. With Goldie as escort, she got on the base and we had a coke date at the post exchange.

The next day I received orders to transfer to Mather Field, near Sacramento, where I was to start the advanced phase of my navigation training. When I got there, I thought again about her wonderful eyes and wrote her a letter asking her to come up for a date. She did and brought Palma Jean "P.J." a college friend of hers, for Goldie. Goldie was smitten, and we double-dated every weekend from then on except one, when Betty had a conflict.

As I was about to graduate in the top of my navigation class, there was precedent that made me think that they might keep me on at Mather as an instructor. Instead, we all received orders to report to combat air groups. By early December 1942, when I knew orders would send me to Tucson, Arizona to join an air group, I asked Betty if she would go with me. She asked, "Well, what would be my status?" "Well," I said, "I guess I'll have to marry you!" It wasn't a big surprise as I had been leaving subtle hints about wanting to marry her all along.

We planned a quick marriage date, and one weekend I went to meet her aunt and uncle, Sadie and Clayton Garvey in San Francisco. He was a lawyer there, and a delight. I learned we couldn't get married on the day we wanted because California then had a law that stipulated a three day waiting period from the time you applied, until you actually got a marriage license.

Meanwhile back at the base during my final day in class, a soldier reported to the classroom and whispered something to the instructor who started laughing and said, "Cadet McFerren, stand up." I stood at attention, and he said, "There's a young lady out at the gate who says she has an application for a marriage license for you to sign." That broke up the class. I met with Betty, signed the license, and later that same day, I received my navigator wings and commission as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Corps.

I then asked for a 24-hour pass to go to San Francisco to get married. They wouldn't give me the pass. I went to San Francisco anyhow, going A.W.O.L. in the process. This was probably not a good example for a newly-commissioned officer. I took a train, then a ferry, and finally met Betty's mother and father for the first time.

I arrived Saturday evening and Betty's uncle had arranged for the city clerk to open up the San Francisco city hall so we could get a certified copy of the marriage license to show the Episcopalian minister who had agreed to marry us at 11 o'clock that night. Wartime security required a semi-blackout, known as 'dim-out', and we drove through the surreal streets using only parking lights. We had the eerie experience of maneuvering through the dark corridors of the huge city hall with just a flashlight to light our way. It was January 2, 1943.

In the excitement and haste, we forgot to arrange a place to stay that night. I tried to get a room at San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel but it was full already. However, just across Powell Street from the St. Francis was the Hotel Stewart, and we asked if they had a room. They didn't, and as we were in its lobby wondering what to do, the manager appeared and asked if we were newlyweds. When I told him yes, he let us spend the night in a room held in reserve for him, but that he didn't use.

It had been a long day, and I was tired. I had also flown early that morning to complete my last training hour. Once in our room, Betty said she was going to freshen up, and I said I was going to go and lie down on the bed. The next thing I knew it was 8:30 the next morning, and I had slept my entire wedding night. I said, "Honey, I wasn't much of a lover, was I?" She said, "Sweetie, you looked so comfortable there, I just couldn't bear to wake you."

I checked in with the base and Harry Long, another roommate told me I was in trouble. He said a by-the-book captain wanted to court martial me for being A.W.O.L. I told him we'd be coming right back to try to straighten things out. We took the train back to Sacramento, and I was lucky that Captain Stadham, a friend from navigation class, was on duty at Mather Field when I reported in. I explained the situation to him. I also explained that I had orders to transfer out to Tucson via Salt Lake City that night by train. I couldn't get my orders because this other captain was holding them.

Stadham said, "Let's go down to the station, you keep your mouth shut, and let me see if I can handle this." We did, and Betty and I just waited around while he spoke to this other guy by phone, and told him to bring my orders down to the station. When the other captain came with my orders, my pal asked for them. The other guy said, "McFerren was A.W.O.L. and should report for a hearing." Stadham, thinking fast, then asked the date of the other captain's commission. It was three weeks later than his, allowing Stadham to outrank him. Stadham then took charge, ordered the other guy to hand me my orders, and the matter was settled.

How to get Betty on the departing train was the next problem. I approached the train conductor and asked him if I could take my wife on the train. He said, winking, "Well according to our deal with the Army, you're entitled to a lower berth, if you can get her in it, you can take her." Besides us, there were eight other newlywed couples on that train.

Another couple had not been able to marry before our transfers because they were Catholic and his fiance forgot to get a letter from her parish priest saying that she had never been married before. When we got to Salt Lake City, we resolved that we had to arrange a proper marriage for them. We found a Catholic priest in town who agreed to marry them using us other couples as witnesses. The priest asked, "Is there anyone here who has known this lady for at least two years and can verify that she has never been married?" When no one else responded, Betty sensing it wasn't going to happen, spoke up saying, "I have." After the brief ceremony, when it was time to fill out the papers, the priest asked Betty to play secretary. Betty then realized she couldn't spell her 'old friend's' last name. The priest wisely said nothing about this strange situation and finally had to laugh about it.

The period from September 1942 to January 1943 was probably the most emotionally exciting, chaotic, carefree, and equally frustrating of my life. I lived only to see Betty on the weekends, and just endured the training weekdays. Fortunately, during that time, she arranged to go back to school at the University of California at Berkeley, which was about 90 miles from Sacramento. We could get together easily as train service was good between Sacramento and San Francisco.

My letters to her during our courtship show the flavor of our escapades, friends, budding, then flowering romance. Sadly, Betty's letters from this particular period, and those sent before September 1943, were missing from my personal belongings shipped back to her after I, too, was declared missing.

Combat Training, Honeymoon, and Off to War

From January to May 1943, Betty and I enjoyed a honeymoon through my stateside combat training at Tucson, El Paso, Denver, and Topeka. Our train trip, via Salt Lake City, ended in Tucson, Arizona two days later. There, I joined the 380th Bomb Group, organized at Davis-Monthan Field two months before. The air group consisted of four squadrons numbered the 528th, 529th, 530th, and 531st. Each squadron had nine B-24s, so our entire group consisted of 36 aircraft. I started my duty in the 530th squadron.

We were in Tucson about ten days, and then transferred to Biggs Field at El Paso, Texas, where combat training in B-24s began in earnest. It was at El Paso where I really got to know the colorful characters who would become friends and find mention in our letters.

The colonel who commanded the group was William Miller, a former senior pilot with American Airlines. With little experience with four-engined aircraft, the Air Corps got many of its early command pilots from the civilian airlines.

Major Fred Miller, our squadron commander, was another experienced civilian pilot who put his gong-ho spirit to work whipping us into airworthy crews. Jack Bratton, another squadron commander with similar flight experience, eventually made a 30-year career out of the service and retired as a colonel.

On one early stateside combat training flight, I was Major Miller's navigator. We were returning to base under overcast skies, and my instruments told me that if we continued on the particular course and altitude he selected, we were going to smack into a 12,000 foot mountain. I called this to his attention, advising either a course or altitude change. However, Miller, with all his experience, was not about to take the word of a green navigator and remained on course.

I immediately rechecked my calculations and charts, and went back to the flight deck with my parachute. I told him, "Major, you either change course, or gain at least 2,000 feet of altitude right now, or I'm bailing out!" Miller, seeing I was serious, apparently thought he'd humor me by acquiescing to an altitude change. When we reached the point where I said the mountain was, we looked down through a break in the clouds and saw the peak a few hundred feet beneath us. I believe that flight set the tone for the enduring friendship and respect we had for each other from then on.

It was during the El Paso training period that our ten-man aircrew welded into the team that would stay together in overseas combat. Crews were intended to be permanent, as reliable teamwork was a critical component of bomber flight operations. As part of that equation, good personal rapport bred confidence in each other.

John Farrington was our command pilot; Alfred Paris co-pilot; John Perry, bombardier; and myself as navigator. Tech Sgt. James De Groat was our engineer and gunner; Tech Sgt. Howard Sleighter, radio operator; Staff Sgt. John Lardin, radio operator and gunner; Staff Sgt. Daniel Glendon, assistant radio operator;

Staff Sgt. James Lovett, tail gunner; and Sgt. Louis Glavan, top gunner.

Under Fred Miller's rigorous tutelage, we were probably the best trained squadron of the group. From El Paso during January and February 1943, we flew almost daily training flights over the army's bombing range at Alamogordo, New Mexico about 100 miles north of our base. Typically, these flights lasted from two to eight hours.

Life in El Paso was not all work. The off hours provided time for Betty and I to enjoy each other as a newlyweds. After sharing quarters with another couple, we rented an apartment, where ever-resourceful Betty set up housekeeping.

Juarez, just across the Rio Grande in Mexico was exciting, accessible, and cheap. That's where we discovered 'Tequila Daisies' a drink that an enterprising waiter introduced to us at lunch one day. It consisted of tequila, lime juice, and grenadine and was very smooth. After three of them each, we walked out into the hot sun after lunch and almost passed out.

On another day, I got a surprise as I was walking along the windy flight line at Biggs Field, and paused by a parked jeep to light a cigarette with a match. It kept blowing out, and a hand from the jeep proffered a Zippo lighter. The hand and lighter were property of Captain Clark Gable, of recent 'Gone with the Wind' fame. He was now a gunnery officer with the 351st Bomb Group training B-17 crews there.

At the end of February 1943, our group shifted operations to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. From there, we started making very long distance flights to the California coast, and throughout the western states. The purpose of the flights was to sharpen cross country navigation, and over-water flying skills. We also learned about the existence of unusual winds aloft. One of our flights at 30,000 feet managed to carry us east to Iowa, contrary to the best of my navigational calculations. It was only during World War II with the advent of high altitude flight, that aviators learned about these 100+ mile-an-hour meandering ribbons of air that flow from west to east in the northern hemisphere at high altitudes. Today we know them as 'jet streams.'

One flight to California for coastal patrol practice, put us into March Field at Riverside, for an overnight stop. There, an amusing incident illustrated how old friendships can transcend military protocol. Part of the old Chanute Field crowd who I knew growing up was Sam Connell, then a captain. At March Field, I saw him walking with another officer and I shouted, "Hey Sam baby! How are you doing?" I ran up to him and he threw his arms around me. Then I noticed there was one star on his collar, and the other officer with him, a colonel, said, "Lieutenant, you don't call the general Sam, baby." Since we were in public, he was probably right, but Sam eased the situation and said, "This guy can."

In Denver, as in El Paso, there were plenty of playful times at the Lowry officer's club, and dancing and dining at Denver's famous Brown Palace Hotel. It was wintertime in the Rockies, and the first time Betty, a California girl, had ever heard really cold snow squeak underfoot.

Betty and I, and Jack Bratton and his wife were staying at the same motel in town. One day while he had to fly and I didn't, he asked me to meet his father who was coming to visit him by train from Tennessee. Jack warned me that his father wasn't used to big city congestion, and could I meet him at the station. I arranged for a car, went down to the station looking for someone described to me as a slight man who would probably look confused.

The train came in, and I saw a man as Bratton described confidently leave the last car with one huge suitcase and one little zipper bag. I went up to him and asked if he was Mr. Bratton. He replied, "Yep, sure am." I said, "I'm a friend of Jack's, he's flying today, but I'll take you to the motel where we're all staying." When I tried to help with his one big bag, I could barely lift it. He warned, "Be careful with that bag, Son." When we got to the motel I horsed the big bag in, and he said, "Put it down here, I want to show you something." He opened the bag, and it was full of nothing but pints of Jack Daniels bourbon. He said, "I hated to see Jack go overseas and have to drink that lousy Yankee whiskey, so I brought this up for him to take on the trip!" He gave me a pint and then stayed for about four days, regaling us with stories of young Jack growing up in Tennessee. That whiskey lasted until we got to Australia.

Our training flights from Denver continued through March 1943. In the first week of April we went to Topeka, Kansas, to pick up the brand new B-24s that were to become ours for the fighting overseas. We spent about two weeks there calibrating the instruments of the new planes. Then we waited for orders to arrive telling us whether we would be sent to Europe or the Pacific.

Betty, of course, joined me at Topeka for what we expected would be our final days together. The brass confined us to base, but it was possible, by hook and crook, to get passes to leave for a few hours. Liquor sometimes greased the process. Many of us just went over the fence at night to meet our wives. Fred Miller found out about my nightly sojourns, and told me I'd be walking tours if he caught me. That was the ignominious way they punished officers.

Then, Topeka was a dry town with no booze sold retail. I had two bottles of bourbon and offered one to the base master sergeant who asked, "Do I have to kill for it?" I said, "No, but how about some passes?" He asked how many, so I hopefully suggested, "About 50 should do it!" To my surprise he agreed, and I found myself custodian of some prized passports to family happiness. Ironically, Betty reported that Fred Miller's wife was also in Topeka and, of course, wanted to see him. Miller learned of that, and when he asked about a pass, he learned that I had all we were ever to get. After his remark to me about walking tours, I'm sure the last thing he wanted to do was ask me for a pass. But he had to see his wife and came to see me. I smiled, handed him two passes, and didn't say a word!

If it seems that I had an influence beyond my lowly rank as a 2nd lieutenant, it was probably because I was 28 years old. Most lieutenants were still in their early twenties, and many captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels I served with were my own age. That might explain how and why my views on certain matters carried weight, and how I was often able to pull off the capers I did.

Finally, the day came signalling the end of my honeymoon with Betty. Orders were received granting a six day leave, after which we were to fly to Hamilton Field near San Francisco for further deployment to Australia. Betty and I went to Hoopeston, to visit my parents, after which I returned to Topeka. Parting was bittersweet, as a great unknown loomed before us. However, little did we know then that fate would bring us a reprieve from separation.

On April 22, 1943 I flew out of Topeka for Hamilton Field, while Betty remained in Hoopeston planning to extend her stay another week or two.

The Flying Boxcar

I have logged hundreds of hours in the 'Liberator' B-24 heavy bomber. Most of that time was in a plane our crew named 'Fyrtle Myrtle' a model B-24D, built with over 1,250,000 parts at Consolidated Aircraft's San Diego plant. I don't recall a 'Myrtle' connected with our crew, but it rhymed with 'Fyrtle', which signified that three of our wives were pregnant when we left for overseas. The names and nose art painted on most bombers evolved from similar personal sentiments of their crews.

The B-24 was a dream or a nightmare to fly, depending on which pilots you talk you. Farrington never knocked the plane. Probably as the command pilot, it wouldn't have been good for our morale if he had. However, when co-pilot Al Paris and I reminisced together in 1995, he said he thought it was a terrible airplane to fly. His memory of the plane, its history, and flying was acute. He amplified some facts I had either forgotten, or never knew because as navigator, I was too busy to notice. Navigating kept me busy all the time when we were flying. Using a bubble sextant to shoot and

work out a three-star fix, and calculate a line of position took about 30 minutes in those days before electronic calculators.

During the 1920s and early 1930s Army brass, with the exception of General Billy Mitchell, still didn't think aviation had much of a future. The notion of a big four-engined bomber was especially beyond the pale, as the Army thought them an offensive weapon that the United States would never need. By 1934 thinking changed, and the Army started development of the B-17 'Flying Fortress' designed by Boeing. It was a four-engined plane designed to fly high, fast, and deliver a massive bomb load to a target.

By 1939, Army planners wanted a better bomber. Specifically, they wanted a plane to fly at least 300mph with a range of 3,000 miles, and able to operate at 35,000 feet. What emerged from the Consolidated Aircraft Company's drawing boards in San Diego, was the B-24.

It looked like a flying boxcar, but had an extremely efficient, 110 feet wide 'Davis wing', named after self-taught aeronautical designer David R. Davis. The elegant wing was placed high on the 18 feet high, 66 feet long fuselage of the plane. The B-24 sported four 1,200 horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines, and normally carried about 2,500 gallons of fuel. It could carry 500 more gallons in two 250 gallon tanks that could be added in the bomb bay, although at a cost of some bombs. The plane's cavernous fuselage allowed it to be adapted as a long-range cargo or passenger transport, or photo-reconnaissance aircraft, besides its primary role as a heavy bomber.

More B-24s were made during the war than any other single airplane; over 18,000 compared to 11,000 for the B-17. Early models cost about $375,000 to build, but when production got rolling, the price came down to about $215,000 each. They were produced at Consolidated's San Diego and Ft. Worth plants, and under contract by Douglas Aircraft at Tulsa, and North American Aviation in Dallas. Ford Motor Company got into the act by adapting auto mass production technology to aircraft manufacture. They built a new plant at Willow Run near Detroit, and produced thousands of the Liberators.

Before the United States entered the war, early B-24 production went to the British for use as ferry command transports, and by their coastal command for reconnaissance duties. The Australian Air Forces also ordered early B-24s as well. It was the British who named it the 'Liberator.'

The plane we picked up at Topeka, Kansas, was a standard version with the characteristic greenhouse glass nose that provided great visibility, but little protection for the nose gunner, and bombardier. After we got to Australia, the greenhouse nose was replaced by an armored nose turret with twin 50-calibre machine guns. The plane carried ten 50-caliber machine guns, two in the nose, two in a top turret, two at each right and left waist positions, and two in the tail.

A 50-caliber round is a formidable projectile. A half-inch across the bore, weighing almost two ounces, it travelled about 3,000 feet per second. One round could easily shatter a big V-8 engine of a modern full-sized pickup truck. The twin 50s could fire about 300 rounds a minute. When flown in a tight formation, a squadron of B-24s could concentrate enormous firepower against attacking fighters.

The B-24 was designed to have a maximum gross weight, including payload, of about 58,000 pounds. We often had to fly it at 65,000 or more pounds when long missions required the maximum amount of fuel and bombs on board.

Liberators served in every war theater. They flew the tragic low-level raid on Romania's Ploesti oil fields, where the Germans were ready and devastated them. The B-17 Flying Fortress got more notice in the public mind because the 8th Air Force and the European Theater got more publicity. But the Liberator's great range made it better suited than the early B-17s for work in the Pacific, where over-water flights to Japanese targets were very long.

The plane had minimal heating and few creature comforts. We brown-bagged our meals, mostly sandwiches, and carried thermoses of coffee aloft. The cabin wasn't pressurized, but there was an oxygen system for flying over 10,000 feet. We seldom flew over that because it took too much fuel to climb to higher altitudes. The plane's 30,000+ ceiling was more important in Europe where German anti-aircraft guns were very effective and capable of reaching high altitudes. The Japanese ack-ack never equalled Germany's.

In case the plane had to ditch at sea, the plane had two life rafts stowed in compartments on the top of the fuselage. To bail out, the B-24 provided several emergency exits. Crews could leave by the nose wheel well; the astrodome used to make star sightings, which was forward of the pilot's location; a top hatch just behind the pilot's flight deck; down through the bomb bay; out either waist gun positions; or down through the main hatch just forward of the tail section.

The debate over the flying characteristics of the plane in comparison with the B-17, will no doubt never be resolved to the satisfaction of the old aviators who flew them. However, the consensus was that the B-17 was a much more

forgiving plane to fly. The B-17 could fly itself with simple trim settings. The B-24 could fly itself only under ideal conditions of speed, altitude, and normal gross weight. Otherwise, it demanded the constant attention of its pilots to hold course. This was an exacting task when the planes had to fly in formation, and became a nightmare when a B-24 lost an engine. This, of course, we already discovered for ourselves on our first attempt to fly to Hawaii.

Once familiar with the B-24's idiosyncrasies, many pilots spoke of a growing affection for the plane. It could capably fly almost every kind of mission from high altitude bombing and reconnaissance, to tree-top strafing and bombing. The plane could take quite a beating and get her crew home safely.

The Air Corps used the Liberator only in World War II. After the war, they scrapped most of them to make the proverbial pots and pans. However, many remained in service with foreign airlines and governments. Some saw service as cargo transports, and fire-fighting slurry bombers. They too, were soon retired when better airframes suited for those civilian tasks were developed. There are a few flying to this day in 'collector' airplane clubs.

I keep a scale model of one suspended from a corner of our family room as a conversation piece and memorial to many memories.

On to Australia

On May 4, 1943, we left California for Hickam Field in Hawaii, flying over 2,400 miles of open ocean. Such a trip was the acid test of navigational skill.

Navigation depends on observing the sun, stars, or landmarks and calculating those sights into lines of position on a chart with the help of an accurate timepiece and tables. An ocean doesn't provide a navigator any landmarks. A one degree course error over 2,400 miles would mean missing a destination laterally by about 40 miles. It's easy to make errors while averaging out celestial sights, or in any of the extensive math calculations needed to reduce a time and sight to lines of position. Fortunately, I had a gift for math, and the discipline to proceed with calculations methodically. During the 13 hour flight, I had made some bets with the crew about my estimated time of arrival at Hickam. I bet we would arrive within 20 miles, and five minutes of my projections, and it turned out we were only 3 miles and 1 minute off.

When we arrived at Hickam, I saw a big sign in the flight operations room that said, "If Lt. William McFerren 0-736015 comes through these quarters immediately call Colonel W. C. Farnum at Hickam Field." Cush was now commanding officer at Hickam, and his wife Louise had written him that I would be passing through on the way to Australia. After the attack at Pearl Harbor, they sent most dependents back to the States, including Louise, who stayed with my family in Hoopeston until she found a place for herself.

I called Cush, and he came over to meet me within five minutes. He told me to tell my crew that I would be his guest, and to leave his address and phone number with them in case we got sudden orders to leave. When we arrived at his comfortable quarters, I started to take off my clothes to put my pajamas on, because we had been flying all night. He said, "Bill, what the hell are you doing? We're going to a party tonight given by the head of the American Broadcasting Company. I've arranged a date for you, and we'll have some fun." I acquiesced, as an order from a superior must be carried out. There were some very attractive Chinese girls there, but just newly married to Betty, I didn't have any incentive to get too sociable.

Pearl Harbor remained the headquarters of the U. S. Pacific Fleet throughout the war, and its commander was Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. As commander of a major air facility in Hawaii, Cush had constant business with the fleet commander's staff, and socially, with the Admiral himself. Thus, one other evening, Cush invited me along to a party with Nimitz and his top commanders. As I recall, there were about 40 people present, mostly admirals and generals, and no one below the rank of major except second lieutenant me.

During my five day stay in Hawaii, I also managed to sharpen my gambling skills. It started when I won a stake shooting dice. I then sat in on a poker game that got down to two other players who had won most of the money. During a hand of five card stud, I had a pair of deuces showing, and my opponent had a jack, queen, king and an ace showing. Any one of them paired would beat me. But he made a psychological mistake. He bet the whole pot, which was $750. I suddenly thought to myself that he just doesn't want me to stay. If he wanted to sucker me along, he normally would have bet a couple of $100. I called him, and he didn't have a pair. He tried to bluff it, and got caught. I

also found a couple of bridge games with stakes at five cents a point and did well. My mathematical gifts included being able to count cards as well as cope with cosines.

The stay in Hawaii was a wonderful civilized interlude before we had to leave for the Northern Australia outback via an island-hopping flight plan. The first stop was to be Canton Island, which was nothing but a small airstrip atoll about 1,700 miles southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. It was built specifically as an aircraft ferrying point to the Southwest Pacific.

About a month before, the famous aviator Eddie Rickenbacker missed the island due to a navigational error, and had to ditch. He drifted in a life raft for 40 days before they found him. There wasn't much room for navigational error with such a small island, and I had estimated our arrival for seven o'clock the following morning. When that time arrived, Farrington asked me where the island was. I said we should be there, and when he dropped his wing, it was right below us. Again I had some wagers outstanding on that leg as well, and ultimately collected six bottles of scotch.

Canton Island was as remote a duty station as they got. When we landed, the local ground crew chief assigned to our plane, said, "I'll give you $75 for every bottle of whiskey you have aboard." I said, "No, we'll sell you one bottle at the retail price, providing that you do a good job servicing our plane." I arranged for a bottle of bourbon, and we got the royal treatment. Liquor as a commodity, would prove to be a prized medium of exchange at various times during our war service.

From Canton, we flew 1,300 miles to Fiji, thence 800 miles to New Caledonia, thence 875 miles to Brisbane, Australia, staying overnight at each stop. Brisbane, in the middle of Australia's eastern coast, was where General MacArthur set up his headquarters after evacuating the Philippines. Answering to MacArthur, was the headquarters of the Fifth Air Force, of which we became a part.

After an overnight in Brisbane, we flew about 300 miles north to the coastal area of Townsville, where Fyrtle Myrtle was to get its nose job. They retrofitted most of the B-24s with the original plexiglass greenhouse noses with an enclosed armored nose turret. It was designed to offer greater protection for the gunner and bombardier. While they did this, we were in the Townsville area for about two weeks. Ultimately, our destination was to be Fenton Field, a remote airstrip with almost no facilities, about 100 miles south-southeast of Darwin, the major seaport at the tip of Australia's Northern Territory.

It turned out we were sent to Australia instead of Europe because John Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, and General MacArthur, pressed President Roosevelt for a heavy bomb group. The Australian military and political consensus in 1943 was that a Japanese invasion of Australia was imminent. Curtin didn't need to convince MacArthur, who needed all the reinforcements he could get to shore up defensive positions of Allied forces under his command.

The strategic situation in early 1943 still did not look good for the Allies in the Southwest Pacific. While we slowed Japanese forces during the naval Battles of Coral Sea and Midway a year before, they still controlled a line that included the Dutch East Indies, Malaysia, Singapore, and northern New Guinea. Australia was short of defenders as most of their regular troops were fighting with British Forces in North Africa.

It miffed many Allied pacific commanders that Washington's priority allocated most military resources to the war in Europe in 1942 and 1943, even though it was the Japanese that officially brought the U.S. into the war. Under this 'beat Germany first' war policy, MacArthur and other Pacific commanders had to beg for the ships and planes they needed just to contain the Japanese where they had advanced. The deployment of our bomb group to northern Australia was one of Washington's concessions to the Japanese threat to Australia.

The 380th's prime mission was to use its long-range B-24s to conduct armed reconnaissance duties for MacArthur's exposed western flank. Based on that intelligence, we were to bomb airfields, shipping, oil, and mining facilities in Japanese-held territory. The Japanese war effort depended on the oil and mineral wealth of the Dutch East Indies. We were to harass the Japanese, and force them to redeploy their planes and troops to defend those areas behind their extended lines. This would prevent them from massing their forces for an assault on the Port Moresby area of New Guinea and Australia itself. By all war accounts, the strategy worked. Our group, and others in Australia, had a strategic effect against the Japanese that belied our numbers and the damage we inflicted.

By the end of May, with our nose turret modification complete, we arrived at Fenton Field to settle in and literally build a working airfield and base of operations. Other flights of our group had proceeded us in April and early May, but we still had not received the bulk of our ground support personnel. They travelled by ship from California, and were still arriving. So began days of setting up camp, and getting oriented to what would be expected of us.

None of the preceding facts could I tell Betty about in our correspondence, which really started in earnest when I reached Australia. All correspondence originating in combat zones was subject to military censorship. That precluded mention of our location, anything to do with operations, missions, command structure, the fate of specific personnel, or indirect references to same. Thus my letters of the period reflect some vagaries, and frustration about not being able to tell specifically what was happening, to whom, or where. I have added the venue of my letters in parentheses for reader information, and annotated 'censored' where material was cut out by the censors.

Getting our Act Together - June 1943

During June, my letters offered Betty reflection and philosophy. We had much free time on our hands after building a reasonably comfortable place to live in the Australian outback and waiting for the rest of our ground support people to arrive.

In the interim, part of our Group was ordered north to Port Moresby, New Guinea. Bratton and Miller's squadrons joined forces with a veteran bomb group there to get some combat experience. It was policy in our theater of operations that replacement groups not fly combat missions without first flying with some experienced crews. So from Port Moresby, some of our people flew missions with seasoned crews of the 90th Bomber Group, to harass Japanese footholds in New Guinea and nearby islands. Our crew stayed behind and I didn't see Bratton and Miller for a couple of weeks.

The 380th Bomb group's orders came from an Air Vice Commodore of the Royal Australian Air Force. Operationally, we answered to an Australian Air Command working under General George C. Kenney's U. S. Fifth Air Force. One benefit of that chain-of-command arrangement was that we were 'pseudo-Aussies' and every week they allotted us two 24oz. bottles of 12 percent Australian ale. It was the long-standing privilege of every self-respecting Australian and British officer, and by default, that now included us. Depending on my mood at the time, one bottle was really enough to dispel or enhance the feeling of loneliness and separation from Betty.

May had been a time of movement and activity. I didn't have much time to think about missing my new bride. Now, sitting on our heels at Fenton Field, I had plenty of time to think about Betty. It was a little over a month since I left her, and love's intoxicating grasp on me did not make for a pleasant withdrawal.

Japanese reconnaissance flights noticed our arrival in the Northern Territory.

Not long after we got to Fenton field via Darwin, they bombed us one night. There was little damage, but we immediately dug slit trenches so we'd have a secure place to go during an air attack. A slit trench runs in a zig-zag pattern that can provide protection no matter the direction of an attack. They didn't follow up. The Japanese never did have the capability to bomb effectively at night. During the day, Australian Spitfires on the coast could intercept and contend with them easily.

One day during this slack period, the medics asked our crew to dig a 10'x10'x10' hole for garbage. I took a shovel and attempted to penetrate the hard, dry, ground, but it would have taken forever to dig that hole with hand shovels. I'd heard some Australian engineers were using dynamite to build a nearby road, and got an idea. Since everyone got a cigarette ration, I asked Farrington, who didn't smoke, to give me one of his cartons.

I took the cigarettes and a jeep, and set off to where the Aussies were. When I found the engineer in charge, I explained our problem to him and said we needed some dynamite and someone who knows how to use it. I said I had a carton of cigarettes to exchange. He readily agreed, and I returned with about six sticks of dynamite and an explosives man.

With a post hole digger, we dug a hole and packed it with dynamite. One of the boys pushed a cap in the top, lit it, and ran like hell. The six sticks of dynamite just barely made a dent in that soil. So I took a couple of more cartons and went back for about 36 more dynamite sticks. These put quite a hole in the ground. Colonel Miller thought we were being bombed because of all the explosions going off. He hurried over and asked, "What the hell is going on here?" I replied, "Your medics wanted a 10 x 10 garbage hole - well, there it is." He said, "Well, I'll be a son-of-a-bitch!", and decided it was best to let Yankee ingenuity flower as it will.

Cigarettes, like booze, were a money substitute with local farmers and aborigines in our outback economy. Then, four packs of cigarettes would get you six steaks, two pounds of butter, and a 25-pound cake of ice. Unfortunately as more

of our people arrived with their cigarette rations, inflation set in. Prices for local goodies went up, but it was still a favorable exchange from our perspective.

One idle mind among our group discovered that a razor blade bent in the neck of an empty beer bottle made a frightful whistling noise when tossed from a bomber. The evidence was the scattering of natives when dropped near their villages from low altitude. Unfortunately, during one such test exercise aloft, some bottles struck and damaged one of the vertical stabilizers in our tail section. This mishap, plus some needed adjustments to our new nose turret, scheduled us back to Townsville for about two weeks worth of repairs.

We decided to make the opportunity a liquor buying trip with money collected from our improvised officer's club. I collected about 3,000 Australian pounds each worth $3.28. In Townsville, I contacted the person in charge of an Australian liquor warehouse and asked if he could arrange for some liquor. He assured me could take care of us, probably thinking we wanted two or three cases. When I laid all that money out on his desk, he damn near died. I wanted scotch and vodka. He said, "Well, I can give you some scotch but not that many cases." All told our order amounted to about 40 cases of rum, 30 cases of vodka, 10 cases of scotch, and 10 cases of bourbon. However, it was a bonded warehouse and the liquor couldn't legally be sold for consumption within Australia without paying a tax. So I said we were taking it to New Guinea, and he prepared the necessary papers to that effect. We then loaded it aboard our plane, and took off to complete the legal fiction, landing about an hour later to complete our repairs.

During our stay in Townsville, I met the skipper of an American LST who formerly taught at an eastern university. He was married, had three kids, but he told me he didn't like his wife. He met some 18 year-old native girl in town and was carrying on a torrid affair with her. He said after the war was over, he was going to go back to live with her, and he did. But, his native flame didn't keep him from asking me, "Do you know any girls here in town?" I told him, "Sure, some Australian WACS." He started counting, "Let's see, there's four officers from your crew, five from mine, we'll need nine girls plus one for me." So I arranged for the ten girls by getting a hold of one girl who arranged for the others. I coordinated all the booze and steaks, and we all had a great time. Of course, we all drank too much. When we got ready to return to the airfield, slightly tipsy John Farrington got behind the wheel of our truck and promptly drove us into a ditch. He had a tough time living that down, but we all took advantage of every opportunity to have a few drinks and fun before we had to return to the bleak outback.

Unfortunately, not all the fun ended upbeat. Freddy Miller had returned from New Guinea, and managed to join us in Townsville where he got himself into trouble. At the airfield we all stayed in a group of four identical barracks surrounding a central shower and lavatory. Naturally, we also had access to the Allied Officer's Club. That's where festivities went to excess one evening. As the night wore down and booze took its toll, Freddy stumbled out of the central bathroom and headed for the wrong barracks. When he went to where he thought his room was, he loudly banged on the locked door shouting, "Open up!" The voice of a captain replied from inside, "Go away, I need my sleep." Freddy said, "You better get the hell out of my room." The reply, "Bullshit, this is my room," prompted Freddy to make a run at the door that broke it from its hinges. He then grappled with the officer inside, and threw him out the window.

The next thing he knew he had four military police on top of him who then threw him in the jug. It looked like he might get court-martialed out of the group, and even kicked out of the air corps. Fortunately for him, a guy who went through flying school with him was on the hearing board looking into the incident. The upshot was they fined Miller $600, big money in those days. He was lucky to get off so lightly.

Another day at the officer's club in Townsville, I ran into a navy officer who was one of my classmates from Yale. "What are you doing here?", I asked. He said, "I'm commanding a sub-chaser, and we're in for repairs. Things are terrible, I get shot up every trip, we don't have enough armor." I said, "Why can't you get armor here?" He said, "I have to have a requisition." I suggested he show me his ship so I could see what he was talking about.

He readily agreed, and while escorting me around the vessel, mentioned he had 20 cases of Johnny Walker black label scotch aboard. Knowing how things worked, I asked, "How many of those cases can you spare?" He offered, "Oh, fifteen." I said, "I think that might just be your requisition."

We piled the scotch in a jeep and went out to the airfield to call on the engineering officer. I said, "I've got a friend here that needs to beef up his armament." He replied with the standard answer that we would have to have a requisition. I said, "By the way, he's got an extra 15 cases of Johnny Walker Black Label Scotch." The officer replied, "That's sounds like a requisition, alright." He got on the phone and shortly we were joined by a group of sergeants. Collectively, they had the needed skills to get the job done. They went down to inspect the ship the next day, and drew

up necessary work plans. In a few days, they had installed enough 50-caliber and three inch guns that it looked like a miniature battleship when they finished. All for 15 cases of scotch.

The arrival of mail was a better morale booster than liquor. It was the balm that took away the sting of separation, and kept a link to the saner world of the home and family. There were long periods of no mail, when we were away from base. During those times, it was particularly difficult to cope with the insanity of our business. However, it often took three to four weeks for a letter to arrive from either from either direction. Due to our remoteness, it didn't arrive every day. It piled up at distribution centers and came in bunches. So Betty and I could not easily reply to the last letter sent like normal correspondents. We each received and replied to batches of them.

As our repair and recreation time in Townsville slipped away, we found ourselves back at Fenton Field in late June, finally preparing for our turn at combat.

First Combat Missions July 1943

It was too bad the nature of our business was such that we couldn't just enjoy ourselves as tourists. In better circumstances, the fabled South Seas where we were would have been the envy of any world traveller. Fenton Field was about 15 degrees, or approximately 1,000 miles south of the Equator.

Most of the world's exotic, remote, and pristine archipelagos and seas lay just north of Australia. Seas with the names Coral, Banda, Timor, Flores, Ceram, and Arafura, were the aquatic highways of island peoples for millennia. They connect the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea, and Australia. The shallow coral reefs, and deep trenches of those waters were a wonderous mosaic pattern of blue-greens as seen from our flying observation point a few thousand feet above.

Below, on the islands, were the proverbial jungles of paradise with rare tropical birds, plants, and peoples that anthropologists and botanists of the era had not yet even discovered. War left most of it untouched. The impact of a few thousand humans and their infernal machines could be absorbed easily within our 850,000 square mile battle area without serious effect.

The most dangerous force in this paradise was the chaotic weather. It was more an enemy to us than the Japanese. As close to the Equator as we were, the mean temperature during the Northern Australian seasons only varied about 10 degrees. The mean was about 80 degrees, but ranged from chilly nights to over 100 degrees during the day. The temperature of the surrounding tropical seas is the highest in the world, over 80 degrees throughout the year. The daily temperature range generated complex weather patterns and ocean currents that caused extremes of weather and rainfall in our area. When we arrived, rain on the coast and inland at Fenton, was less than inch for all of June, July, and August. In September, the wet season began by the gradual arrival of a monsoon that brought lots of rain. It would peak at 15 inches a month during January.

Offshore, the daily temperature variation influenced by the warm seas, bred ferocious thunderstorms that made flying planned routes to targets tricky at best. We learned to skirt these storms, adding extra miles to long missions, taxing fuel reserves to the limits. Sometimes, a storm couldn't be avoided, and the experience for a lumbering four-engine bomber was as traumatic as an aerial confrontation with the Japanese.

On one flight we couldn't avoid a thunderhead that looked like the mushroom cloud of what the world would later associate with an atomic bomb. Flying about 3000 feet high, we entered that cloud, and suddenly were hurtling upward nearly a mile a minute, with our airspeed dropping to 90 miles an hour. Our wings were shaking as if to bid us farewell. The B-24 stalls out at 120 mph, but the updraft forces proved stronger than aerodynamic principles. I don't know how many of us nervously wet our pants, but many of us did.

Waiting for what seemed like an eternity, we finally emerged some 30,000 feet up on top of this enormous cloud. Then just as suddenly we caught a down-draft of equal intensity and down we went at the same rate, wings still attempting to wave goodbye. John Farrington and Al Paris must have used every trick in the book just to keep the plane right-side up. A few hundred feet above the water, the down-draft weakened and we were able to regain altitude and continue with our mission. It shook us up, but we learned a valuable lesson about the capricious South Seas weather.

The military situation definitely turned against the Japanese in our area by July. Our early raids on bases and facilities they held in the Dutch East Indies had confounded their plans for further conquest. They thought they were out of the

range of Allied air forces, and our audacious long-distance raids surprised them. As predicted, it forced them to divert personnel and material to shore up defenses of their remote air and war production bases.

It permanently canceled their invasion plans for Australia, and New Guinea. On July 6 they made their last raid against our base at Fenton Field. Protected by vigilant Australian Spitfires that intercepted their attacks at the coastline, the Japanese couldn't conduct the reconnaissance to assess our true strength. Had they known how thin we and the Australians really were then, they could have persisted and decimated us, as their supply lines were shorter than ours. We emerged the winners of a strategic bluffing game.

The 380th's early operations in May and June had cost the 531st Squadron all of its nine aircraft. Enemy action, weather, navigation errors, mechanical failures, carelessness, and inexperience took their toll. As a result, they reassigned us and the Fyrtle Myrtle from the 530th to the 531st as a way to rebuild that squadron. This meant uprooting us from our 'new abode' at Fenton Field. We joined the 531st at Manbulloo, an airfield about 80 miles southeast of Fenton. But it was close to the town of Katherine, and some semblance of civilization. Fenton Field proved too small to hold the entire bomb group, so two squadrons operated out of Fenton and two out of Manbulloo.

The group's headquarters remained at Fenton and this caused us some irritation. They required us to stop at Fenton after a mission for an intelligence debriefing before proceeding to our own field. After 10 to 12 hours in the air, stopping at Fenton, then flying to Manbulloo, often at night, did not make for happy warriors. If there was a better way of debriefing before the days of electronic mail, no one thought of it.

A careless incident that lost a plane occurred on what we called a 'fat cat' trip to pick up fresh food, booze, other essentials in Sydney. Major Everett Ware, the deputy group commander, piloted the B-24, and I was one of a couple of dozen passengers. After loading up, we prepared for the 1,800 mile return trip to our northern base. The navigator on the flight, advised Ware that he should take on additional fuel for the trip, as on board supplies were marginal. Ware ignored him saying he thought there was plenty on board.

Enroute, an electric problem shorted out the radio, and in the confusion, concealed the fact that the flight had drifted off course. When they discovered this problem, Ware for some reason ignored course corrections, and we arrived at the northern coast but not where he intended. We were lost, very low on fuel, we couldn't to anything but attempt an emergency landing.

Ware rejected a beach landing in favor of a wheels down landing in what looked like a smooth grassy area behind the coast. As we touched down, it turned out the 'grass' was six feet high and tough. Immediately the nose wheel collapsed and about 25 tons of B-24, full of food and booze abruptly stopped in a mere 100 yards. It caused bumps and bruises to crew and passengers, with one airman receiving a serious ankle injury. Luckily, I didn't get hurt. The first aid kits on board took care of most of the injuries, and controlled the serious ankle problem.

That night, there was little water to drink. We decided to open up, and spend the night consuming a case of sparkling burgundy to relieve a bad situation. A deployed emergency beacon was how Fenton Field found out about the whereabouts of their missing plane, and another B-24 was dispatched early the following morning to survey our situation. As the plane appeared on the horizon looking for us, someone in the crew fired some flares to pinpoint our location. However, the flares descended still lit and ignited the dry tall grass into a raging fire that winds swept toward our stricken bomber. Nothing could be done and the fire engulfed the plane, effectively liquidating the taxpayers $300,000 investment. Courtesy of the Australians, we finally got back to Fenton by truck a couple of days later. Their fee for the rescue and ride was most of the remaining booze. The buck stopped at the top, and the hapless major lost his job.

I made my first combat mission on July 10. It was an 11 hour, 1,700 mile round-trip armed reconnaissance mission to Sorong on the extreme north-west tip of New Guinea. We were to survey the Japanese-held port and to attack any facility or shipping target that presented itself. We made the trip without any enemy resistance, probably due to the element of surprise. On July 18, we made a night mission to Makassar, a western seaport on the main Celebes Island about 1,200 miles northwest of Manbulloo.

The problem was we couldn't fly there directly, as we would have to pass over the island of Timor, held by the Japanese. Thus, the flight involved skirting Timor both coming and going. We returned with what could have only been a few drops of fuel in our tanks. We learned in the school of hard knocks about the fuel requirements we needed to cope with skirting Japanese fighter bases, plus the fickle weather systems enroute.

During one of these early missions we met up with two Japanese fighters. I then learned something about the stoical nature of our expert top turret gunner Sgt. Louis Glavan. He was from North Dakota and as a kid, learned to shoot

quail on the wing with a 22-caliber rifle. They selected Air Corps gunners, in part, by their ability on the skeet range. It's a good example of shooting at a moving target. When we were training in El Paso they got him out on the range to see what he could do. His first effort busted 23 out of 25. The next round he busted 25 out of 25 and later, he knocked down 97 out of 100 skeet. He was a hell of a shot. When the first Japanese fighter attacked us, it scared the hell out of me.

I saw him coming down at us from about 11 o'clock and Glavan just held his fire. I kept asking him, "Louis, when are you going to shoot?" He said, "Relax Lieutenant," letting a burst of tracers loose to get his range. The next burst nailed the Jap. As the second fighter closed at the same angle and speed as the first, Glavan had him in his sights and got him too.

Episodes like this, proved an invaluable learning experience about the personal idiosyncrasies of our crew. It instilled confidence that each person knew his job and would do it without the others having any cause to worry. These first missions created a cohesive crew that worked harmoniously under the stress of missions to follow. Another flight to Sorong on July 24 wrapped up our July combat operations.

Meanwhile life at Manbulloo had settled into repeating what we had done at Fenton - build a hospitable living environment for ourselves. As our new base was close to a civilized town, we had a source of ice. This was a godsend during the 100+ degree days. It eliminated the need to make occasional 'high altitude training flights' to 30,000+ feet for half an hour to chill beer.

There was a slow moving river near us, and during the hot sunny days, I used to take an air mattress and relax on it. Once, while I was paddling along a guy from the shore yelled, "Get the hell out of there, there's an alligator after you." It was actually a salt water crocodile, and they are really dangerous. I turned and saw him coming toward me, and paddled like hell to get safely to shore. Once there, we decided it would be him or us, and later, we laid in wait for him with automatic rifles. He finally crawled up on a sandbar, and on the count of three, we let go with about 40 rounds. That ended any future swimming and sunbathing problems.

In our spare time we added to our fresh food supply by fishing. We had fishing gear and lines in our survival kits, which we used in the river and several good-sized ponds nearby. Some guys in our group would fish with explosives, and while this resulted in fabulous catches, was less than sporting by my fishing philosophy. Surprisingly, we caught the same kind of fish I caught back home, small mouth bass and catfish. We would shoot wallabies, a type of small kangaroo, and bait our hooks with their livers. What the hell other species, it was wartime and humans were killing each other. All life was cheap, and we needed irresistible bait.

Mail service was turning into a massive problem for the transport command and us. The volume of personal air-mail from combat areas going in both directions started to compete for space in aircraft with essential wartime supplies. The government devised the V-mail system to attempt to cut the weight and volume of mail. V-mail was a one page printed form with sufficient space for a message that would then be photo-copied on micro-film. The film would be shipped and a print-out made at the receiving end, which would then be sent to the addressee.

The authorities asked us to use V-mail instead of regular letters as much as possible. There wasn't much room to write a long letter, and you needed a magnifying glass to read the result. Such was the nature of the references about the efficacy of V-mail in our July correspondence.

Business Picks Up - August 1943

Our business with the Japanese had now picked up vigorously. We were flying reconnaissance missions to assess what they were up to in all the major seaports and airfields they held in the Dutch East Indies. In Brisbane, MacArthur organized his forces to retake New Guinea and the Philippines. His staff constantly needed to know about Japanese movements and strength on the western flank.

Shipping was the only means Japan had to transport the prized resources of the Southwest Pacific 2,750 miles north to their home islands. On all their shipping routes, they were vulnerable to increasing Allied submarine activity, surface ships, and attack from carrier-based aircraft, and our land-based bombers.

However, unlike a fixed land target, a ship in motion was very difficult to bomb conventionally. The Norden bombsight, designed for a calculated bomb run against a fixed target, was useless against a ship that can take evasive action. To counter this, General Kenney's staff devised a technique called skip bombing for use against ships.

In principle, it was like skipping a rock across a pond in a series of low trajectory bounces. They developed the tactic to use primarily with the versatile Mitchell B-25 twin-engined medium bomber. Flying just 200 feet off the water, they dropped a 250 pound bomb toward a ship at 200 mph. The bomb would be released about a quarter mile from the target vessel. When it hit the water, it would skip along the sea, penetrate the hull, and explode by delayed action fuse.

Skip bombing's success with the Mitchell bomber prompted Kenney's air staff to try it out with the B-24. We practiced the technique on a beached freighter off the port of Darwin. It was another practical art in our bag of destructive tricks. Once, during a skip bombing attack on shipping during bad weather, we knew we hit the ships, but the bombs didn't go off and we thought we had duds. We had forgotten about the delayed fuses, as post-strike intelligence confirmed our success.

On August 13, we flew one of the longest missions of any bomber in the war. This mission, and follow ups to the same target, earned us a Distinguished Flying Cross and a Presidential Unit Citation. Balikpapan, Borneo, was the site of a major oil refinery that supplied the Japanese with about half their lubricating oils and 60 percent of their aviation gasoline. Balikpapan was as important to the Japanese as the famed Ploesti refineries in Rumania were to the Germans.

Headquarters planned the raid with old intelligence information about the target. The element of surprise precluded any pre-strike reconnaissance. Our primary purpose was to destroy the refinery and sink as many ships in the port as possible. We also wanted to let the Japanese know that nothing they controlled was safe from our long reach into the bowels of their supply lines. We planned a 12 plane night attack to add to the surprise, but under a full moon to aid our visibility.

The strike would be 2,700 miles round trip. We used Darwin as a staging area to shorten the trip. With 3,000 gallons of fuel and full bomb load, we taxed the limits of the B-24. It took all of Darwin's 10,000 foot runway to get aloft. At the target, half the planes would attack shipping at masthead level, and half would make a conventional bomb run at 7,000 feet. On the way, the flight had to cope with three weather fronts that proved too much for two planes who had to abort the mission.

About midnight, we arrived over a fully-lighted refinery. It was like shooting a sitting duck. When we dropped our bombs, the Japanese initially didn't realize they were under attack from the air. The low level attacks quickly convinced them otherwise. They doused the lights, but by then the light from the explosions and fires kept the targets visible. We got a few holes in our tail from anti-aircraft fire, but it was a very successful strike. All our planes returned to Darwin, some with only a few drops of fuel remaining in their tanks.

The flight took 16 hours, and was the equivalent of flying one way from San Francisco to New York. Two days later we sent a couple of aircraft to make a post-strike assessment of the attack. A couple of days after that, we struck again, to let the Japanese know that our first attack wasn't a fluke. They apparently got the message. They pulled forces from New Guinea to Balikpapan, and to protect their other now clearly vulnerable targets in the central Dutch East Indies.

Generals MacArthur, Kenney, and the Australian air command were jubilant at our performance, thus the recommendations for the DFCs and unit citation we received later.

As important as that mission was, my most satisfying mission was one we made later in the month on the port of Babo in north-west New Guinea. Babo was home to a big Zero air base. The month before, we lost three planes of our group during attacks on that well-defended port.

One of the problems was a weather front consistently hanging over the Babo area during that time of year. It precluded attacking in formation where we would be better able to defend ourselves. However, during the planning for the mission, I remembered from navigation school that this type of foggy weather front did not go all the way down to sea level. It left about a 400 foot clear space underneath. I recommended to the planning staff that we fly the last part of the mission under the weather until we got a few miles from the target. Close to land we knew the weather always cleared and we could take the formation over the top of some protecting hills around the coast to bomb at 3,000 feet.

The Group's staff liked the idea, and we flew the last part of the raid over the sea at 300 feet. That's tough flying, you have to be paying attention second to second. When we got close, the weather cleared as predicted. We pulled up over the tops of the protecting ring of hills, and were right over the target and surprised Japanese. They didn't get a fighter in the air, and we left a suitable swath of destruction on their parked Zeros.

Fyrtle Myrtle's specific target at Babo was a marked Red Cross hospital. The intelligence staff told us it wasn't a hospital at all. It was an ammunition dump that the Japanese had disguised as a medical facility. It was risky business to attack it, because if the intelligence proved faulty, it would have meant a gross violation of the rules of war. If we had

attacked a real hospital, Tokyo Rose would have had a field day in the radio propaganda war. Bombardier John Perry let go a string of 500 lb. bombs on the target. One made a direct hit, and confirmed our information. The place blew up with a terrific explosion. As soon as we bombed, we headed into the clouds again. After our return, Colonel Miller asked me about staying on an extra three months after my tour of 300 combat hours was over. He offered me the job of group navigation officer. He would promote me to captain on November 1, and make me a major when I reported for the job on December 1. I hedged my bets. There was a conflict between a sense of duty, the extra money that the new promotions would mean, and getting home to Betty.

An Adelaide Vacation - September 1943

By now, I had logged about 140 hours of combat time. I needed 300 to qualify for stateside duty and return to my beloved Betty. September operations didn't add much more time to the tally. We flew only two combat missions and had to abort another because of engine trouble. A much-needed seven day leave in the southern Australian city of Adelaide also cut down the opportunity to log more combat time.

One of those missions showed the difference in perspective from the staffs who planned our missions, and we who had to fly them. Ambon was an island about 800 miles north of us where the Japanese had an extensive air base and harbor to supply coal and other provisions to their forces. On September 3, the planning staff ordered a mission to attack its harbor facilities, but specifically said to leave all the shipping alone.

When we arrived, we came out of the clouds and saw that the harbor was full of ships. As we dove down to make our bomb, run we noticed that there was one particularly huge transport sitting there. Despite orders, bombardier John Perry was dying to bomb it. It took a heated discussion to convince him that we had to pass it up and conduct the mission by the book. Finally, Perry insisted that when we got back we should find out the reason we had to pass up such a target of opportunity.

I could easily do this. Besides being squadron navigation officer, I had also become its intelligence officer. That job required me to get the flight logs from each airplane on a mission and make a preliminary assessment of target damage. Through our own staff, I then reported results to Australian headquarters in Darwin. While talking to the Aussies, I asked why we specifically couldn't bomb shipping on that mission.

They told me knew about the shipping in the harbor, and there were six submarines on their way to intercept any convoy from there when it sailed. They'd be sitting ducks for torpedoes, which are more accurate and certain than aerial bombs. Ultimately, we heard that they sank 26 ships, which was probably a much better score than we could have achieved, and a lot less risky. As only one part of the tactical plan, we were not privy to the larger picture as seen from headquarters. The result was that we didn't question operational orders from headquarters after that.

Also, after a mission and debriefing, it was informal policy that every member of the flight crew got two shots of 'medicinal' whiskey from the flight surgeon. This was an added incentive for us to get things in order on the flight back, to insure that debriefing finished as fast as possible.

There were some non-combat flights that month as well. On one, I flew as navigator for Colonel Miller on a trip to Fifth Air Force Headquarters in Brisbane. Apparently about the time we arrived, some high ranking official was also expected. When we landed at Brisbane, the tower thought we were the VIP flight and instructed us to taxi to the reviewing stand. I was the first one out of the plane. When Miller noticed all the troops at attention, he called to me from the cockpit window, "Tell them at ease." So I barked out "At ease," and they realized we were not who they were waiting for, and directed us to a less distinguished part of the field.

While there, Miller had planned to stay at the hotel where MacArthur and the other big shots stayed. Because of my lowly rank as a 1st Lieutenant, the hotel clerk said I couldn't stay there. Miller got really irritated and informed them that "He's my navigator, and I never let a navigator out of my sight!" The hotel caved in, as we were just there overnight. I appreciated Miller's going to bat for me. His support was also probably part of his campaign to instill a personal rapport, and convince me to stay on as group navigation officer.

My facility for navigation and averting disasters was pretty well known by then. Once, coming back from a long mission, we ran into about a 150 mile-an-hour head wind that was severely cutting into our fuel reserves. As the fuel crisis deepened, I started shooting two-star fixes that were a lot easier and faster, but less certain than the longer three

star fixes in determining an exact position. Constantly updating our position, I was giving Farrington a series of one degree course corrections.

Suspecting the worst, he finally said, “Bill, what the hell is going on, why are you giving me these minor corrections?” I said, “Because unless we come directly into Darwin, we are going to go into the drink.” When we finally approached Darwin, there was so little gas we didn’t run a traffic pattern, we just flew straight into the strip and touched down. When we got down to the end of the runway, two of our four engines shut down for lack of fuel. It was that close.

On September 13th, we got seven days leave, which meant a carefree vacation in civilization. They sent us to Adelaide on the south coast. Adelaide was a sedate, beautiful city, located in the middle of an extensive grape, citrus, and truck farm region. The area was much like Southern California.

Until we arrived, units of American servicemen hadn’t visited the city. Accordingly, its city fathers had put in a request to Allied headquarters in Brisbane to be put on the leave circuit for the added money it would bring to the local economy. They rewarded Adelaide with the visits of the 380th Bomb Group. As I learned later, we were the only American military group to visit the city on a regular basis during the war.

Since we were the first American officers to take leave there, the American Counsel gave a dinner party for us. During dinner, I met a girl by the name of Katherine Rymill, who turned out to be a real athlete. She asked, “What sports do you like?” I said, “Well, I like to fish and I like to play golf.” She said, “Well, I don’t fish, but I do play golf, would you like to play in the morning?” I agreed, of course, and she made arrangements to pick me up about eight.

We went out to the local club where the old caddie master managed to find me a set of clubs. I bought some balls, and as we got to the first tee, I said, “What’s your honor?” She said, “We’ll match for it.” She won and approached the men’s tee. I asked, “Don’t you play off the women’s tee.” She said, “No. I play the blue tee.” She tee’d her ball and hit a drive over 200 yards right down the fairway. She made many more straight shots that round, and wound up shooting a 73. When I got back to the clubhouse, I remarked to the old caddie master, “Miss Rymill is a hell of a golfer.” He said, “Well, she’s probably the best woman golfer we have ever had from Australia, she once beat Patty Berg.” Little did I know I was playing with the Australian women’s champion. The people we met in Adelaide were delightful and hospitable. Like folks on the U.S. home front, all of Australia was on gas rationing. Many resorted to charcoal-burning devices that generated a gas that powered their vehicles, even busses. We had the foresight to bring some five gallon cans of 100 octane aviation gasoline with us. They could use it for their cars in exchange for ferrying us around, and other favors. It had to be cut with kerosene or it would have burned up the engines of the old flivvers people drove. Between the gasoline and cigarettes we had with us, we had no lack of grateful acquaintances who helped us with our tour of the city and area.

The Australians, like my wife Betty, are great horse enthusiasts. About the third day we were there, we went to an amateur horse race that posted a œ100 prize for the winner. Just before the race was to start, the announcer asked if anyone in the crowd would like to substitute for a jockey that was ill. Our bombardier John Perry volunteered. Besides being a good bombardier, Perry proved an able horseman by winning the race and the prize. The additional funds just added to the merriment of our vacation.

Our hosts fixed us up with dates. My lady was the daughter of the owner of the hotel where we were staying. After five months away from my wife, it was difficult not to let the booze, good times, and parties carry me away. I managed like a real trooper. However, I remember my dad told me that, after you get married, if you ever stray, even if your wife catches you in bed with another woman, deny it.

The grapes around Adelaide made good wine. We toured a big winery where we learned that the Australians added fizz to almost all their wines. Of course, Champagne and Burgundy were sparkled for a long time, but they sparkled the Rhine and Moselle, and just about everything else the vintner could conjure up. Touring wineries and breweries was an essential part of our ‘spiritual’ revival in Adelaide.

Upon my return from leave, besides accumulated mail, there were two cables. One was from Betty announcing the birth of our son on September 11. The other from my father saying, “Congratulations on the birth of Bill 3rd. You’re so awkward, I never thought you’d make it.” The paternal dig was because he was an expert using tools, I was not. Mechanical aptitude was never my strong suit. Being a new papa was great, but a remote experience for me 8,000 miles away from the blessed event. I found myself starting to sign letters home to Betty ‘Bill Sr.’, happily getting used to my new role and circumstances on the home front.

From the time Betty and I parted in May, I used my luck at gambling while overseas to send extra money back to her, augmenting her allotment. I did pretty well for a long time, but in September for some inexplicable reason, the cards did not fall my way and I started to lose money. It portended a run of bad luck that culminated in late October.

Betty's letters written from late September 1943, now follow my own. Ironically, I never received or even read them before 1995. Due to a four week delay in the mail, her letter of September 26 arrived at Manbulloo after I got shot down and reported missing in action. The mail officer returned it and all others with the notation 'return to sender - missing in action.'

By the time they made the return trip, Betty had received her official telegram of my status from the War Department. When these letters started to pour in, she just thrust them aside in grief. They remained unopened, neatly tied in bundles, for 52 years until we rediscovered them in the Spring of 1995. It would be an understatement to say that reading them kindled emotions and memories I thought long lost.

Terror in the Sky - October 1943

The reality of war got very personal when the Japanese shot Fyrtle Myrtle down on October 26. Our combat month began on October 5 with another reconnaissance mission north to Sorong and some neighboring islands, to photograph Japanese facilities, shipping, and defensive activities. MacArthur's ground forces were preparing to invade New Guinea and needed more intelligence on Japanese positions. On October 10 we made a raid on Makassar in the Celebes island group to destroy harbor facilities and oil storage areas.

On October 13 the 380th got orders to shift part of the group to Port Moresby on the Southeastern coast of New Guinea. MacArthur asked 5th Air Force's General Kenney to 'bring everything he had' within easy striking distance of Rabaul, New Britain. Rabaul was a big Japanese supply base serving its forces in the Solomon Islands and northern New Guinea. MacArthur's ground forces wanted Rabaul neutralized to cut down the supplies available to the defending Japanese. Kenney gathered 86 aircraft from various U.S. groups, and whatever the Australians could provide. We were among the 12 planes the 380th Bomb Group sent.

We left Manbulloo that morning, and arrived in Port Moresby in the afternoon. As we were getting out of our plane, we noticed a P-47 fighter land, and a pilot wearing civilian clothes got out. I asked the ground crew chief who it was. "Why," he said, "that's Colonel Lindbergh." I said, "You're kidding, what the hell is he doing over here?" He said, "He's working for Republic Aviation, and he's been demonstrating to the pilots over here that the P-47 is a good aircraft against the Zero. Today he went up and shot down two Zeros."

When I went into the flight operations shack, I approached Lindbergh and said, "Colonel can I speak to you? He said, "Sure, what's on your mind, young man?" I told him about how as a 12 year old boy in the 1920s, one of my fishing forays got interrupted because of him. I related how in the distance I heard our town's fire whistles suddenly start blaring on and on. "It was because you had landed in Paris," I summed up. He got a big kick out of that.

From Port Moresby, we flew to Rabaul about five days in a row, but had atrocious weather working against us. During the entire time, a persistent cloud cover prevented us from reaching, or making any effective bomb runs against targets. Our biggest accomplishment was not running into each other in the soupy weather. Our air effort against the Japanese came to naught, and by October 20 we were back at our base at Manbulloo.

Colonel Miller, our commander, was still after me to agree to stay on after my tour was up. While I wanted to get home to Betty, and my son, it was war. When they praise you for your skill, and they need you, it's hard to shirk the responsibility. Then there was the matter of money. My only personal income at that time was my lieutenant's pay. Betty's parents weren't rich, and it embarrassed me when they gave us $1,000 for a wedding present. That was a lot of money in 1943, and I wanted to return it to them.

Also, my status in the military hierarchy would benefit from the rapid promotions to captain, then major, that came with the new job. Two days before I got shot down, I told him I'd stay.

Our target on the fateful day of October 26 was Pomelaa, a nickel refining plant on the main Celebes Island. Plans called for 12 planes in the raid, six from Fenton Field and six from Manbulloo. The six from Fenton Field never joined us for a variety of mechanical reasons. Two from our Manbulloo group also aborted for mechanical problems. Only four aircraft flew the mission. Again, orders said do not bomb shipping. The target priority was a plant that supplied over 60 percent of the nickel the Japanese needed for the alloys that went into their aircraft production. Also, any delay

chasing shipping targets would keep us over the target too long and expose us to Japanese fighters based 100 miles to the north at Kendari.

The post-war record of the mission is unclear about the reason, but one pilot broke mission discipline and diverted after a sizeable transport ship. Two other planes and we completed our runs at the target from about 5000 feet, and were ready to head for home. We called the other plane on the in-flight radio net and ordered the pilot to break away from his attack on the ship and get back in formation. He replied, "Leave me alone, I've gotta get that ship."

Farrington decided to wait for him to provide support and protective cover. I warned him, "John, we can't afford to spend time over the target." He ignored me, and we spent about 25 extra minutes in the target area. That was just enough time to allow the Japanese Navy Zeros to scramble from Kendari and reach the area. It was only about a 15 to 20 minute flight for them once they received news of the attack on Pomelaa and took off.

It was about noon and by now, I was so mad at Farrington I yelled at him, "That bastard ought to be court martialled," adding, "I just got married, we've just had a little boy, and I'll be damned if I want to lose my life over somebody deliberately screwing up a mission and targeting my ass."

Finally, we all cleared the target area and the four of us formed into a diamond formation heading home. While we were having lunch, the Japanese intercepted us at the southeastern tip of the main Celebes island. About a dozen Zeros came in on us from dead ahead. Our new nose turret never responded properly, and their first burst of cannon fire hit us there, instantly killing bombardier John Perry, nose gunner James DeGroat, and fatally wounding Farrington. The shells also set fire to a pressurized hydraulic reservoir that operated the nose wheel. At the time, I was up on the flight deck right behind Farrington. When they started shooting, I ducked behind one of the armored plates on the flight deck, which saved my life.

Howard Sleighter and I tried to put the fire out, but the hot hydraulic fluid had too much of head start, and we couldn't. The plane was lost, Farrington had died, and now as senior officer aboard, I sent Sleighter back to the waist area to tell the crew to bail out. Losing altitude by now, we were down to about 3,000 feet in a shallow, but irreversible dive.

Sgt. Louis Glavan was firing away from the top turret. I reached up, slapped his leg and said, "We gotta get out of here." He came down from his turret and we opened the top escape hatch and signaled Tracy Dumont, our new co-pilot who had replaced Al Paris, to jump out. Part way out of the hatch, he froze and wouldn't jump. So Glavan and I each took one of his feet and flipped him out, hollering after him not to forget to pull the release cord on his parachute. Glavan went out ahead of me, but he didn't survive. He could have hit one of the vertical sections of the tail, or if he made it down, sharks might have caught him, or he drowned. After he left, I pulled myself up into the escape hatch. Just as I did, the plane blew up, and I was in the air, dazed, and in a free fall.

After I overcame the initial shock, I pulled my rip cord about 500 feet over the water. My chute opened, and the sudden quiet was overwhelming as I drifted down. It was a beautiful day about one o'clock in the afternoon. I thought, 'Oh, God, what if this is my last day?' I hit the water, and went down about 20 feet. While under water, I was afraid of my getting tangled in my parachute shrouds. As soon as I could, I grabbed the front snaps, released the chute, and kicked away from it. Then, I pulled on my Mae West, the popular term for a chesty-looking inflatable life vest, which shot me up to the surface.

I looked around, and I saw two life rafts floating some distance away. Somehow, when the plane blew up, the inflatable life rafts located in compartments on the top of the aircraft miraculously deployed. It seemed like it took me forever to swim to those life rafts. Once I got closer to them, I saw that Tracy Dumont had made it down and was already in one of them. After personally helping to toss him overboard, I was relieved that he had regained composure enough to pull the rip cord on his parachute.

I still had my survival kit, which had emergency food, first aid, other supplies, and extra ammunition for my revolver. When I got to the raft, Dumont was still somewhat dazed. I handed him my survival kit, and he clumsily tossed it over his shoulder. It missed landing in the raft and sunk. After all the trouble I took to preserve the kit, that really made me mad. Once in the raft, I looked around, and saw that we were not far from the rescue point for that mission. I suffered some superficial scalp burns and bruises during the bail out, but I felt lucky to be in one piece. I thought we had a chance to reach the rescue point.

We paddled toward the escape point towing the other life raft. There was a chance of picking up the guys in the waist area who bailed out ahead of us. At a flying speed of about 120 knots, every minute means we travelled a couple of miles. This accounted for all of us survivors being scattered over five miles of ocean. Howard Sleighter, and the crew

in the rear had jumped a couple of minutes before Dumont, Glavan, and I did. Once on the sea, I figured we were about 12 miles from land, and 900 miles from home base.

By now it was about two in the afternoon. About 45 minutes later we saw a Japanese patrol boat bearing down on us. The Japanese, of course, would have alerted their coastal command to look for two downed B-24 crews. The returning formation lost the plane with the hotshot ship chaser as well. The Japanese were probably eager to get their hands on some living members of the 380th Bomb Group that had been harassing them for these many months.

As the patrol boat approached, I checked my pockets to be sure that I had nothing that would compromise us. The only thing I found was a letter from my wife. She had written it three hours after our son was born. In it she had scrawled, 'we had Bill III today. Honey it wasn't too bad. It was like falling off a high bar.' I'd kept that letter with me since I received it, but because it had her address on it, I tore it up and pitched it over the side.

I could see that the patrol boat was well-armed with cannon and machine guns. When I pulled my revolver out, Dumont still not thinking too clearly, asked in panic, "What are you planning to do, shoot it out with them?" I said, "Tracy, don't be a nut. They've got the heavy armament, I just want to get rid of this gun, so they don't think we're hostile and fire on us."

I was about to become a prisoner as I had dreamed just two nights before. I mentioned this in my October 24 letter to Betty. I was about to begin two years of physical and emotional hell in the hands of the Japanese.

Captivity and a Trip to Japan

A million thoughts flooded through me as the Japanese patrol boat approached. It was standard myth among our troops that to be killed or captured by the Japanese amounted to the same thing. Skeptical of rumor and myth, I didn't know what to expect. Always an optimist, I had to hope that the essential decency of human beings would prevail, even in war-time. As they approached us, any philosophizing about my calamity gave way to coping with the moment, and hoping for the best.

When they came alongside, they dropped a ladder and beckoned us to come on up. On deck, they stripped us down to our skivvies and motioned for us to sit down. None of them spoke English and they left us alone until about 4:30pm when the officers went down to eat. As soon as the officers went below, a Japanese sailor motioned for me to stand up. I stood up, and then he hauled off and hit me in the nose. I used to box when I was at Yale. In my shock and anger, without thinking, I lashed out at him and he fell to the deck. He started to get up, and I nailed him again.

That gut reaction was a mistake. The others quickly responded, beat the hell out of me, and I came to my senses and realized this was not a college game. That was the last time I hit any Japanese while I was a prisoner. They finally fed us some tea and a couple of rice balls, and left us on the forward deck that chilly night, still scantily clad. We damn near froze.

The next morning we docked at Kendari. I recognized it, because we bombed it on a previous mission. There, they put us in a jail. That night the voice of a Japanese guard I never did see asked me in English, "I have a wife in Los Angeles, do you think she's okay?" Hoping to win a friend, and not knowing anything about his wife, I tried to give him a reassuring answer. I said something about how decent and fair Americans were, and he should not worry. He might have heard about the U. S. Government's policy of rounding up Japanese-American families and resettling them in camps. After the war, that policy appalled me. Many Japanese-Americans served with distinction with our armed forces in Europe, and while many didn't know it, in the Pacific as well.

The next day, the fighter pilots who shot us down came to see us. One of them asked in good English, "What do you think of Japanese pilots?" I replied, "They're damn good, they shot us down!" I really did have respect for Japanese pilots, and tried to flatter them. It paid off because in return for the compliments, they gave me package of cigarettes. Japanese cigarettes were terrible, but they were better than nothing.

Two days later, we heard American voices. Lardin, Sleighter, Lovett, and a photographer we had with us, had made it to an island. There, they arranged with the natives for a boat and some provisions to take them back to Australia. Long before the war, the Australians had been trading with native islanders, and had set up a coastal network that remained friendly to Allied forces. The boys had appropriate charts for their trip, but the Japanese caught them at sea, brought them to Kendari, and they wound up in adjacent cells to Dumont and myself.

John Lardin told me he didn't have a Mae West on him after we ditched. He and Sleighter swam eight miles to shore. He said that after he had been swimming a couple of hours, he looked back and there was a big shark following him. He never looked back again, just kept going. Luckily, he and Sleighter were competitive long distance swimmers.

Two men were still missing, Louis Glavan, the top turret gunner, and Daniel Glendon, one of our waist gunners. No one but the sharks could possibly know what happened to them.

Then the interrogation started. Dumont and I followed standard procedure and told them this was our first mission. This was only half true, for it had been Dumont's first mission, and my 19th. The questioning went on all day. Primarily, they wanted to know where the designated escape point was. Unfortunately, that day we had a photographer on board who was not a regular member of our crew. I had never met or even seen him before, because he had boarded the plane while I was getting my weather briefing before we took off. The first time I laid my eyes him was after we were in prison.

We found ourselves in trouble when the photographer told them things they wanted to hear. It was he who apparently spilled the beans about the existence of an escape point, and told them that only the pilot and navigator knew where it was. Actually, our entire crew knew about the escape point. They quickly recognized a willing stool pigeon, and flew him to Tokyo for what I assume would be better treatment.

Since Farrington our pilot was dead, the Japanese focused on me as navigator to get the information they wanted. When I refused to talk, they started to beat me, kicking me in the groin, and otherwise making live miserable. Somehow after all that, I managed the composure to point out that I, as an officer, would know more than a private.

I explained I was not privy to the means that might be used for our rescue once we sent off a distress signal by radio. I said they might look for us by air, or sea where we ditched. I told them I couldn't know about pre-arranged escape points since it would be impractical to establish them to cover all ditching possibilities. The rank-conscious Japanese believed me for the moment and let up on me.

The Japanese eagerly wanted to learn about our escape point. They had apparently learned that either a PBY 'flying boat' or a rescue submarine would rendezvous at that point precisely one week later looking for survivors. In the area were we went down, within sight of Japanese-held territory, they assumed it meant a submarine would arrive for the rescue mission. They wanted to get that submarine.

A day or two later, they decided that I probably knew more than I was letting on, so they tried the ultimate psychological ploy on me. In the morning, I they took me from my cell and tied me to a tree. A squad six young Japanese soldiers with rifles marched in under the supervision of an officer. He said that I was going to be shot unless I told them what they wanted to know. He even 'iced' the situation by offering me a last drink and a cigarette so I could think about it.

I didn't give a damn about myself any longer. I figured I would soon be dead, and mentally said goodbye to my wife, son, friends, and parents. I resolved not to endanger the lives of 90 American submariners who also had sweethearts, children, and wives. As a military man, you know what you have to choose when it's your life or 90 others. When I told them I wasn't going to say anything else, the officer ordered them to cock their rifles and get ready to fire. True to my heritage, I thought, 'If I'm going to die, I'm going to do so with pride and self respect.'

Then the officer made a downward motion with his arm, but they didn't fire. They repeated this sequence four times in all, and even today, I can't recall how long it took. It seemed like hours, but the whole episode probably took place quicker than I was experiencing it. After the war I learned that the Japanese staged a similar mock execution with another captured 380th Bomb Group crew. I don't know about those guys, but I was never so scared in all my life.

The next day, they decided to change their tactics. They brought me before a high-ranking Japanese officer who they said was an admiral. He was a slight man, in his forties, who spoke good English. He courteously introduced himself to me, and had them bring me some clean clothes, a pair of pants and a khaki shirt. Then he said, "I'm very upset that we mistreated you, and it won't happen again while I am here." However, he started questioning me, and I kept telling him I didn't know how to respond to what he was asking.

Trying a softer approach, he ordered some food for me and asked, "Do you like Sake?" I said I liked anything with alcohol in it, and that got a laugh out of him. He said, "Well, why don't you and I drink a little Sake together?" Of course, I agreed, and his aides delivered a quart bottle of sake for each of us. We started drinking and talking pleasantries.

What he didn't know was that I had a high tolerance for booze because after every mission, I drank a fair amount of vodka or scotch to relax. As we neared the bottom of our sake bottles, he ordered two more, and shortly began to show the effects of the alcohol. After we put a serious dent in the second bottles, he passed out completely.

There were three other Japanese present during my session with the admiral. When he passed out, they couldn't contain their embarrassment. They took back the clothes, kicked me in the groin again, and threw me back in jail. I thought to myself that at least I taught one Japanese a lesson about drinking against an American. I mused that the treatment I received was par for what happens to an experienced Yale drinker when he beats the competition.

After 19 days at Kendari, they drove us by truck to Pomelaa. I thought they were taking us there to execute us, since this had been our target. When we arrived, we could see the nickel mine damaged by our bombs. Unfortunately, I could see that we had missed the power plant tower, as it was still standing. My fear of execution proved unjustified. They loaded us on a small ship for the day's sail to Makassar, another of our targets on the west side of the main Celebes island.

Once we got there, our own group flew over and bombed us. Fortunately, the Japanese were decent enough not to blame the raid on us. At Makassar, there was an American prisoner, a P-38 pilot the Japanese shot down at Babo. He also confirmed that our earlier mission there blew up an ammo dump marked as a hospital. They held us at Makassar about four days, then put us on a ship bound for Balikpapan in Borneo, which was the port and oil refinery we bombed twice.

On that ship we were the charges of a Japanese chief petty officer who seemed to be about 50 years old. He treated us well and wouldn't allow anyone to hit us, but this decent treatment didn't last very long. At Balikpapan they put us in a former Dutch jail. We were there three weeks, while the ship was undergoing some repairs and took on a cargo of bauxite, an ore of aluminum. The food was terrible, and we had to relieve ourselves in our small cell through a hole in the floor. It got to be one awful stench.

With repairs and loading completed, they put us back on the ship with our destination now Singapore. The same chief petty officer was in charge of us. I found out that he had been at Annapolis long before the war when the Japanese government donated and planted cherry trees there. He liked Americans. I told him I didn't think the war was a good idea, and he agreed with me.

On the second day out, a Japanese sailor came up and hit me in the face, knocking me down. The old chief saw the incident, grabbed the man, and beat the hell out of him. That was the last time anyone hit us on that trip. The best treatment I got from the Japanese was on that ship.

On Christmas Day 1943, we arrived in Singapore. There, while I was up on deck for the customary afternoon tea, the chief sent for me. When I arrived at his quarters, I found him sitting on a mat with a bottle of whiskey. He got up, shook hands and said, "Today is Christmas, let's you and I have a drink." He ordered some food, and we spent a few precious moments that transcended the fact that we were at war. When we were through eating, he said somewhat self-consciously, "Now get out of here, Christmas is Christmas and war is war."

We left Singapore bound for Japan in a convoy of 15 ships; 11 transports, and four escort vessels. About three days out, while on deck one afternoon, one of our convoy's ships about 300 yards away exploded. A torpedo hit it. In short order, I heard other ships blowing up. The convoy was under attack by American submarines. They sank seven of the transports and two of the escort vessels. Our ship had a narrow escape when a torpedo passed closely by our stern. We turned back to Singapore and picked up another convoy. With them, we set sail again for what turned out to be calm week's voyage to Japan. Underway, I used to look at the moon at night, and think how it was the one thing Betty and I now had in common.

We put into some southern Japanese port during the night, and they put the six of us on a train to Tokyo right away. There, they sent us to Ofuna, an interrogation camp about 30 miles southwest of Tokyo. This turned out to be the worst camp I was in during my time in Japan. I got there January 2, 1944, which was my first wedding anniversary, and I thought it was one hell of a way to spend it.

During all this time and trauma, I resolved that I was going to pull through. Whatever was in store for me, I would get back to Betty and my young son. I was going to do whatever it took to survive that was consistent with military expectations and my sense of personal honor.

On November 2, 1943, about a week after the Japanese captured me, the War Department sent Betty the dreaded telegram reporting me missing in action. The news travelled quickly to my family and friends. Letters of consolation,

support, and explanation poured in to Betty. Bravely, she continued to write me in hope I would be found, so I would have mail from home awaiting my return. But even her gallant 'chin up' attitude had to wane, when her letters still came back marked 'missing in action.' My correspondence had now ended, and the impact of those early traumatic days of my captivity on the home front unfolds in the letters from Betty, family, and friends.

Prisoner of War

One retreat from diplomacy is the idea of devising legal niceties to regulate the organized violence of war. Oblivious of the absurdity, most civilized nations did just that in the mid-19th Century. At meetings held at The Hague, Netherlands, and Geneva, Switzerland, diplomats and lawyers conjured treaties that provide elaborate rules for war combatants, the safety of civilians, and treatment of prisoners. Japan, the United States, and the other countries subsequently involved in World War II, agreed to, and signed these treaties.

However, it's certain that no fighting man who becomes a war prisoner will reject the protection and rights a treaty may offer just because the notion of rules for war is logically ridiculous. No doubt most captured airmen, sailors, and soldiers survived and returned to their families because of the restraining influence of the Geneva Convention which specifically governs the treatment of prisoners of war.

In part, the Geneva pact mandates that prisoners be given food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention comparable to that of the armed forces of the country holding them. When questioned, war prisoners need give only their name, rank and service number to their captors. Officers cannot be forced to work without their consent. Japan's diplomatic and military leaders were fully aware of these treaty provisions, but allowed their troops in the field to ignore them. Apparently, they thought their many quick victories in the Pacific would force a negotiated peace from the United States and its Allies. It didn't occur to them that the war would be long, they would lose, and have to answer for their ill treatment of prisoner of war.

The prisoner of war problem between Japan and the Allies was also a fundamental clash of cultures. The wartime Japanese Imperial leadership drummed into its military recruits that surrender was an unthinkable disgrace to the Emperor. Death was preferable to dishonor. From my experience, this propaganda affected younger members of Japan's military more than it did its senior officers and mature non-commissioned personnel. If the idea of being a prisoner was repugnant to the Japanese themselves, it was no wonder their contempt for Allied prisoners.

Thus, it amazed the Japanese that Americans wanted their families to be notified of their capture. The prevailing view of most Japanese troops in the field seemed to be, 'Why would any soldier dishonor himself and his family by admitting he had been captured?' It was in this cultural context that I, and thousands of other Allied prisoners, experienced a bizarre mixture of cruelty and kindness while we were prisoners of the Japanese.

When horror tales about the atrocious treatment of Allied prisoners started to leak out, there was a storm of international protest from the press, international relief agencies, and neutral country observers. When they knew they couldn't win the war, the Japanese leadership sensed they could be indicted as war criminals unless they treated their prisoners as required by international law. Even so, in the prison camps, they made only a minimal effort to conform to the Geneva provisions. The early beatings, threats, and intimidation I suffered when I was first captured by capricious field troops, didn't get much better in the prison camps on the Japanese home islands.

While officially treatment was supposed to be fair, we now had to deal with eccentric prison guards who personally vented their frustrations on us as their country and Emperor were being progressively disgraced on the battlefields.

In theory, being a prisoner had some good points under the terms of the Geneva Convention. You were now out of the war's combat zone, couldn't be killed legally, and would be repatriated when hostilities ceased. As your pay continued to accrue with your home country, you had a lump-sum forced saving account awaiting you. Officers didn't have to work, and it meant you now had time to recuperate, and just wait things out without much fear. The difference between theory and fact was the difference between being a prisoner of the Germans or the Japanese. For us in Japan, it was no picnic.

The Japanese constantly harassed us with strict regulations, the slightest infraction of which would often result in physical beatings. It was illegal, but it happened capriciously and often.

However, discipline among the Japanese themselves was very strict. When a camp commander entered the compound, the Japanese guards and Allied prisoners alike, were supposed to greet and salute him. One time we gave the necessary

obeisance, but the guards, not expecting their commandant, were still in the barracks drinking tea and playing cards. The commandant bellowed for them and they came peeling out to assemble before him. He was so furious that he struck the leader of the guards in the head with the butt of his pistol, and inadvertently killed him. It was the only time I ever saw anyone killed in a camp.

That camp commandant was just a sergeant, but with the progress of the war, the Japanese became more sensitive to complaints about the treatment of prisoners, and officers replaced sergeants as camp commanders on the theory they would know more and exercise restraint. Camp personnel rotated frequently, as it probably was distasteful duty to supervise 'dishonored men'.

Unlike the 'brainwashing' experienced by many Korean War American prisoners, where ideology played a big part in the conflict, there was no organized political or psychological propaganda directed at us. However, in one-on-one conversations, the Japanese would tell us that much of the territory they conquered for their 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' had historically been in their sphere of influence for hundreds of years. They did not encourage us to learn their language. What we did learn, we just picked up day by day. As opposed to German prison camps, we had no English reading materials supplied to us, no games, or much of a recreational nature. However, since the Japanese were great baseball enthusiasts, they did provide baseball and softball equipment, and organized games for us. In one camp, there were two American teams, with me managing one, and a Jap guard managing the other. When my team won, the Jap manager was furious and hit me. I couldn't strike him back or I'd have been a dead man. He was just a bully with the circumstances stacked in his favor.

General prison camp routine was to awake at dawn, assemble in ranks outdoors no matter what the weather, get counted, and participate in a ritual bowing to the Emperor. As this routine became daily more aggravating, I took to muttering softly for my buddies' ears only, "I hope you die, you son of a bitch." Everyone laughed like hell, and the guards couldn't figure out what we were laughing at, so rather than appear dumb, they laughed too.

Food was terrible compared to what we were used to. The morning meal was usually just a thin watery bean paste soup. Lunch and dinner were either rice, or barley with soy sauce, fish heads if they were feeling generous, and a vegetable. Overall, the three very light meals we got each day contributed little by little to acute malnutrition.

Each prisoner section would send someone to the central kitchen to get the food, which was then dished out in the barracks. Once, we caught one of our guys keeping all the vegetables for himself, so he was dealt with appropriately by a few of our own boys. There are always a few bad apples among our own, but I was never aware of any actual collaboration.

As hungry for food as we were most the time, we didn't have the energy or luxury to think and talk about women and sex. The subject would arise only on the rare occasions when we got a little more food. To add to our general discomfort, we slept on straw tatami mats in bunk beds without the soft mattresses and pillows most of us took for granted.

Yankee ingenuity provided certain amenities. We improvised playing cards from the cardboard bottoms of tea cartons. Highly-prized American cigarettes became a quasi-legal tender in the camps. Each Red Cross package contained two packs. We were supposed to get a relief package once a month, but I only remember receiving three the whole time I was a prisoner. The Japanese dragged their feet distributing these sought after prizes, and most goodies slated for us were pilfered by the guards or found their way to the black market.

Early in the war, because prisoner of war administration was such a low priority for the Japanese, their prison camps held all ranks of servicemen and civilians lumped together without discrimination. Later, they began to segregate military from civilians, and officers from enlisted personnel, to allow prisoners to organize themselves into orderly hierarchies, with each group selecting a representative to deal with the camp commandants. A requirement of the Geneva Convention, it also made it easier for the Japanese to administer the camps by encouraging a sense of self-discipline among prisoners.

The Ofuna camp was run by the Japanese Navy primarily for interrogation. We were a mixed group of about 150 Americans, British, Canadian, and Australian military personnel and some civilians from Wake Island. I was there from January to October 1944. It was a disease-ridden hell hole. However, to be fair, even for Japanese troops, medical attention was almost non-existent, so I guess they thought they were not violating the equal amenities clause of the Geneva regulations.

Swiss representatives from the International Red Cross inspected periodically, and consistently complained that not enough essential medications were on-hand. The camp doctor was a real bastard, and several prisoners died from deliberate lack of medical care and malnutrition. He was subsequently tried and convicted as a war criminal.

I'll never forget my first night there. Shortly after I was thrown in a cell, a voice through the thin wall called to me, "Hey, you over there, are you a new prisoner?" I said, "Yeah, who are you?" The voice replied, "I'm Greg Boyington, just call me Pappy." He explained that he was a marine fighter pilot, and was shot down in China. He had arrived at Ofuna about a month before I did. He reiterated standard policy that I should tell the Japanese that I was on my first mission, and to pretend that I didn't know much. He said they used forms when they questioned you, and to tell them some arbitrary number when they asked questions, which seemed to keep them satisfied. Boyington, was the famous ace who commanded the 'Black Sheep Squadron.' He was a terrific guy from Washington state and I got to know him well. At the end of the war he received the Medal of Honor for shooting down over two dozen Japanese planes.

One morning he got into trouble when we shared a cigarette that I managed to steal from the guard's sleeping quarters. Pappy took his half and ducked in the latrine to have a drag. A guard returned and caught him. They dragged him out in the middle of the parade ground, stripped him, and made him stand at attention for hours. They had respect for Boyington though. When they beat him and he would never utter a sound.

They started questioning me again a few days after I arrived. An interrogator we called 'Handsome Harry', who spoke perfect English grilled me. He wanted to know how many planes we had at Hickam Field in Hawaii, how many at Canton Island, and how many at Brisbane. Noting his pencil and form, I took Pappy's advice and told him I thought there were about 200 planes at each place, and it seemed to do the trick. They questioned me about once a week after that. I guess they were trying to see if I would forget what I had said the week before so they could catch me in a lie, which would mean a beating. Fortunately, I have a good memory and didn't trip up.

Because the Japanese traditionally love bathing, we were allowed a hot bath in the community bath house each week, but not without an audience. When we went in to bathe, some girls who apparently worked discretely for the Japanese guards, would make it a point to come and watch us. If a guy was well-endowed, they'd acknowledge it saying 'takusan, takusan'. When someone was small, they'd giggle and say 'sukoshi, sukoshi.'

Food was particularly scarce at Ofuna not only because it was in very short supply, but because on delivery day, the guards stole about a third of the prisoners' allocation. Over a short time, I lost 60 pounds and my weight came down to a little over 100 pounds. dripping wet.

I can't remember a night when I didn't go to bed hungry. My feet were in terrible shape from beri-beri caused by a deficiency of vitamin B. Increasingly, I had a great difficulty walking, and developed skin problems and diarrhea from general nutritional deficiencies. We ate any living thing we could get our hands on. One day we caught a cat and cooked it. It wasn't too bad.

They didn't work officers at Ofuna as a matter of course, and we passed our time walking the perimeter of the camp and commiserating with one another. But sometimes we would be assigned to carry pots of feces out of our latrines for the Japanese to use as fertilizer on their gardens. It was a recycling practice common throughout the orient and developed over centuries to get the best return from limited land area and grow food their large populations.

As the war seriously started going against Japan during 1944, the guards at Ofuna routinely started to beat us every time the Allies conquered a new piece of territory. Mostly, they beat us with their fists. When Tinian Island fell to the Allies, they took 30 of us out to a field and beat us with baseball bats. They struck me repeatedly in the kidneys, and afterwards, I started to pass blood in my urine. Because of that beating, I had to undergo surgery after the war, to correct a problem that subsequently developed in my urinary tract.

A curious fact emerged as I reviewed war crimes testimony that I and others gave after the war about the ill treatment we received at the hands of the guards at Ofuna. Another officer testified that before being questioned, he was given a slip of paper which said in substance, "You are not a Prisoner of War but an unarmed enemy, and your position here can be regarded as an extension of hostilities. If you behave well and answer questions properly, your treatment will be governed accordingly, and as well as existing regulations permit. The safety of your life is not guaranteed."

I personally, did not remember receiving such a notice, but whoever contrived such a bit of legal obfuscation probably thought they were hedging provisions of the Geneva Convention in doing so. How many other Allied prisoners were so warned, I can't say, but clearly, Japanese prison camp personnel might have thought it thereby gave them license to do whatever they wanted to their captives. This clever legal ruse to contravene the Geneva provisions was blatantly illegal, but might also explain the Japanese attitudes towards prisoners at the time.

By Fall 1944, the Japanese knew that world attention focused on their prisoner of war atrocities. To improve their image, they offered us the opportunity to record a message to our families that they would broadcast over Tokyo Radio. The broadcast could be easily received by short-wave receivers in the United States, especially on the Pacific Coast. We didn't want to appear as collaborators in a propaganda ploy, but we wanted desperately to get word to our loved ones.

At the time, Betty didn't know whether I was alive or dead. We agonized about whether it was all right to do this. Our senior prisoner officer made the decision that we should do it. The possibility of our families receiving some news that we were at least alive, outweighed the perception that we were helping the Japanese clean up their act. I made several messages and Betty received three.

My first radio message was broadcast in October 1944, almost a year to the day after I was shot down. It was the first word Betty received that I had survived the crash of Fyrtle Myrtle and was a prisoner of war. She and our young son were at home with her parents, when the phone rang late one night with a long distance call from a woman in San Gabriel, California who said, "I have a message from your husband for you."

She damn near died. She told me she started to write down the message as the 25 words were repeated to her, but after when she looked at it, there was nothing on the paper but a bunch of unintelligible scratches. Within a few days, she received confirmation of the same message from four or five other short wave radio listeners along the Pacific Coast.

After the war, I discovered that a man named B. O. South, who owned a bar in San Francisco, tape recorded as many of the broadcast P.O.W. messages as he could. He then made them into records, and sent them to the respective families who could play them on a record player. We still have the ones Betty received. When she sent him money to help with the cost of the record and postage, he returned it explaining that since he was physically unable to be in the service, this was his contribution to the war effort.

We visited him after the war in San Francisco and thanked him personally. He told us he had recorded over 7,000 messages. Many other radio hobbyists did the same thing, providing welcome relief and news for families whose sons were initially declared 'missing in action' and turned up as prisoners of war.

After nine months at Ofuna, I had become seriously ill with dysentery and malnutrition, plus complications resulting from the blows to my kidneys. The Japanese moved those of us they thought might die to Omori, a bigger camp on an island in Tokyo Bay, where there was a better chance of getting proper medical treatment.

The transfer to Omori was probably the luckiest thing to happen to me, and equally sick Tracy Dumont, during our entire experience in Japanese captivity. It literally saved my life. It was a camp with about 800 prisoners. The food was better because they assigned me to a barracks with a bunch of former British convicts who managed to steal lots of it for themselves and others. These guys told me they had been in British colonial jails when the war broke out, and the authorities offered them a pardon in exchange for serving in the army and fighting the Japanese.

The British organized them into an ad hoc military unit, and they dubbed themselves 'The Royal Scots'. They were great fighters until they had to surrender to the Japanese at Hong Kong. There were about 30 of them at Omori. Many had been burglars, they were adept at stealing almost anything. However, true to the well-known adage about 'honor among thieves' they did not steal from a fellow prisoner.

They managed to steal enormous amounts of sugar, shrimp, crab meat, and anything else they could get their hands on at the wharves where they were forced to load and unload ships. They stole right under the eyes of inspectors who checked them daily as they came back from work details. Each of them sewed many little pockets in their clothing to conceal purloined booty such as sugar.

One of the first evenings at Omori, a Royal Scot named Fitzgerald saw me starting to eat some rice, and said, "Lieutenant, you're in pretty bad shape, don't try to eat that rice, it's two-thirds barley and it will make your diarrhea worse." I feebly protested that I was starving. He told me not to worry, he and his boys would feed and take care of me.

He produced some crab meat and sugar. It was an odd combination, but it tasted like ambrosia. Fitzgerald was also able to arrange for some medical bismuth compound that finally arrested my diarrhea. Up to then, I was so weak and the diarrhea had gotten so bad, it took two of them just to get me up from squatting over the hole in the floor that served our sanitary needs. Those guys were wonderful to me, and I know I would have died if it hadn't been for them.

Once, when we were low on sugar, another of the Royal Scots, named Patty, a small, tough, wiry Irishman volunteered to get some. Since there was no sugar ship at the wharf, he had to go to the warehouse, at great risk to his life. He shimmied four floors up a chute to get it, but somehow he managed and came back with the goods.

Another time, using an audacious and risky strategy, he brought back a can of crab meat. The Japanese would check us returning from the wharves by making us file by the inspectors with hands up in the air so they could pat us down. It was a fast process, they just looked down each body, never up. The way Patty managed to purloin the can of crab meat was by removing it from his pocket and holding it discretely in his hands above his head. After he passed the checkpoint, he put it back in his pocket. He and the rest of those Royal Scots were one brave bunch.

The Japanese Army operated Omori instead of the Navy. They allowed us to write a 25-word letter to send home through the Red Cross. Unfortunately, many letters never seemed to get to the Red Cross or sent. There was an American lieutenant colonel in camp by the name of Jim Walker whose mail wasn't getting out. My luck was better, so I volunteered to include a message to his wife in one I sent to Betty.

He gave me her maiden name, and the address of her parent's home in Newport News, Virginia, where she was staying. I contrived the message: 'Dear Betty, I'm in good health, and kiss our Bill for me. Please tell my sister, Fran Lewis in Newport News, at such and such an address, that Jim sends his love.' It got through, and Betty managed to get her phone number and tell her about her husband. It was the only message she received that he was alive.

Contrary to the Geneva Convention, at Omori they ordered officers to work. Once when I was on a work detail digging a trench, a guard started giving me hell, saying I should shovel faster. I told him I was doing the best I could. He called the camp commandant, a bastard of a sergeant, who came over and hit me a couple of times for good measure and blustered, "I'm going to send you out for some real work." That turned out to be another lucky break for me. He sent me to the nearby railroad yard to unload box cars with a couple of Japanese civilians.

One of them was an older man who poked at my shrunken stomach the first day I worked with him and said, "Damae, damae" meaning 'very bad.' I told him I was very hungry. After I ate my meager lunch of a rice ball and cold watery soup, he gave me a great big, hot, sweet potato that he had cooked in the ashes of the little fire where we warmed our hands. I never ate a steak in my life that tasted as good as that sweet potato. To this day I relish sweet potatoes and yams. That kindly old man even gave me cigarettes.

Another day we saw a truck loaded with crates of red apples coming towards us. He said in Japanese, which I was beginning to understand, "Keep an eye out." As the truck passed, he grabbed a crate of apples and tossed it to me. I hid it under a tarp. When it was time to return to camp, I didn't expect anything, but he divided those apples evenly between us. Other times we stole tuna, and whatever other food we came across. Over time, I gained back twenty pounds and a semblance of better health. While working with them, we were pretty much on our own, as they didn't need to a guard us since a Caucasian had little chance to escape or hide in oriental Japan.

I developed a good relationship with those two Japanese. They hated the war as much as we did. With their help, I was constantly able to get small amounts of additional food to supplement the camp's meager diet. Sometimes, I was able to steal and eat enough during the day to forego the evening meal, which I would pass along to Tracy Dumont, who was still very weak.

One day we found a Japanese-English dictionary in a boxcar. I took it back to camp and gave it to Lt. William Harris, a Marine Corps Annapolis graduate among us, who was a linguist. He had never studied written Japanese before, but by sneaking as much time as he could when the guards weren't around, and comparing it with what he learned orally and Japanese script, he figured out how to read a newspaper headline. We arranged to swipe newspapers from the guard's quarters while they were out making their ritual morning obeisance to the Emperor. Harris turned out to be brilliant, and after a month, he could get the gist of the news in a Japanese newspaper or magazine.

We were badly out-of-touch during all those months with no news of the war that we had left so abruptly. The uncertainty about what was going on was dreadful, and morale suffered tremendously, but now with our new independent information source, we could indirectly keep up with the war's progress. Our challenge, was to learn to filter through the Japanese propaganda to get a glimmer of the truth.

The Japanese were terrible about what they told their own people about the course of the war. For instance, Harris noted a story about the Allies losing seven aircraft carriers down in the Philippines, and other incredible war hyperbole. Later, as we caught on to the flow of how they handled war news, and when he could find no more mention of the Philippines, we correctly figured that the Allies must have taken back the Philippines. Another outrageous story described how many men and how much war material we lost on Okinawa. When that story appeared no more, we correctly figured that we had retaken Okinawa. Fortunately, Harris and his 'news service' remained with our group until the end of the war.

About a week after I arrived at Omori in late October, 1944, I saw a big four engine plane that I couldn't identify, flying at a very high altitude over Tokyo. It looked like a reconnaissance flight to me. Similar flights continued for several days, revealing to us that we must now have air bases closer to Japanese home soil, operating with the new longer range bombers that we knew were on the American drawing boards. I learned later it was one of the new B-29 Superfortresses.

A know-it-all American colonel in camp said, "The Allies won't bomb Tokyo until the Germans are out of the war." Since I had some personal experience with the timing of reconnaissance flights and follow-up bombing raids, I offered to bet him a portion of my meager rice ration they would bomb Tokyo within ten days. Only two or three days after that, B-29s dumped the first bombs on Tokyo.

From our island prison in Tokyo Bay, we witnessed many B-29 raids, and saw many of our planes get shot down. This was tough to take, but we knew it meant that the war must be going well, if our planes were now regularly bombing the Japanese home islands.

Over the next couple of months, the bombing intensified, and about mid-January 1945, to the surprise of both the Japanese and us, American carrier-based planes appeared overhead. Our camp sirens started to wail and in a couple of minutes, the sky was full of carrier-based Navy Hellcats. The implication was clear that American carriers were operating with impunity near the coast of Japan. The Japanese couldn't believe it.

Now, however, we found ourselves in danger of being injured or killed by 'friendly fire'. We begged for paint to mark the roofs of the barracks with the letters 'POW', but to no avail. Though the bombing was good for our morale in one way, it's horror and proximity caused some of our guys to crack up under the strain. We could easily understand what the Japanese civilians were going through under the constant attacks.

I continued working in the railroad yard and one day, we heard bombs falling. The peculiar sound of their descent, and some gut instinct, prompted me to warn the others to get over to the other side of the track embankment. We did so and, sure enough, the bombs hit where we had been working. My instincts and hunches have always served me well.

At Omori, an amusing incident took place involving a U.S. Navy Commander also named Fitzgerald. He was a submarine skipper captured with his crew when their boat was forced aground in shallow waters by a Japanese sub chaser. A scrappy Jap guard in camp loved to draw a circle on the ground and challenge anyone to step inside and take him on. He was the camp bully-boy and none of the other Japanese guards liked him.

One day he taunted Fitzgerald to get in the circle with him. Fitzgerald said he'd do it if he could defend himself. What the Jap didn't know was that the commander had been a boxing coach at Annapolis. When the contest began, Fitzgerald surprised him with some quick boxing tactics and knocked him cold, to the uproarious delight of all the other Japanese. The bully had met his match.

In March 1945, Swiss Red Cross observers found out about various camp violations, including working officers at Omori. The Japanese devised an evasive tactic by spreading us around to different camps, so it would be harder to keep a constant track of us. They moved me to a makeshift camp in a brick yard on Tokyo Bay on the outskirts of Yokohama. I was there for what proved to be a dramatic three months.

The camp commandant at Yokohama was the tallest Japanese I had ever seen. He was six foot four and had been a hurdler in the 1936 Olympics. He turned out to be a real prince, and wouldn't allow his guards to beat us. This was characteristic of other Japanese who had travelled extensively outside Japan, and knew Western cultural ways.

He also offered us a deal. If we planted a vegetable garden, he would let us keep three-fourths of the produce, with the remainder going to the guards. We started a good sized garden on a slope in back of the camp, but ironic circumstances that developed shortly, kept us from reaping the fruits of our labor.

It was now May 1945, Germany had surrendered, and Allied resources and air power shifted to the war in the Pacific. General Curtis LeMay transferred from the European theater to take command of the 20th Air Force, a B-29 wing in the Pacific. He devised a strategy of indiscriminate incendiary bombing of Japanese cities. We had captured Iowa Jima to provide a badly needed airbase just 750 miles south of Tokyo for the new long-range and powerful P-51 Mustang fighter.

Without this fighter cover, previous B-29 raids had to bomb from around 30,000 feet to avoid Japanese interceptors who couldn't effectively fly or shoot that high. Now with fighter cover, they could deliver heavier bomb loads with deadly accuracy from 6,000 feet day or night.

May 26 turned out to be a day of reckoning for Yokohama and our garden. The devastating Allied air raid that day started in the morning with what seemed like hundreds of P-51s. They came in without the bombers to engage and eliminate Japanese fighter aircraft on the ground and in the air. From our camp we watched with morbid fascination what turned out to be a massive dogfight with Japanese Zeros over Yokohama. The P-51s mauled the Zeros and after finishing with them, strafed ground facilities including our unmarked camp.

Fortunately none of us got hit, but they came close. There was one older guard at Yokohama who was particularly decent to us. He was a bit on the rotund side so we called him 'Fatty.' During a strafing run, he got so scared he started to tremble and simply froze in place. As one P-51 bore down on us, I pushed Fatty in a slit trench and jumped in on top of him. He made a good pillow to land on, and later gratefully credited me with saving his life.

Without Japanese fighters to worry about, that evening two waves of B-29s from Tinian Island came in low with incendiaries that set Yokohama ablaze and resulted in a fire storm. Right next to our camp, a three story building got hit with naphtha jelly that literally splashed all over it. The awesome power of the attack both elated and scared the hell out of us. It also destroyed part of our camp and our garden. The next morning, with the city still on fire, more B-29s came in with delayed action 2,000 pound demolition bombs that ruptured the city's water mains. This ended efforts to contain the raging fires.

After that raid, I knew the Japanese were really in trouble. Yokohama had been a beautiful modern city before the B-29s incinerated about four and a half square miles of its center. If similar raids were happening to other Japanese cities, and if I wasn't killed in the meantime, I knew the war would soon end, and I would be on my way home to Betty and my young son.

A few days after that devastating raid and damage to our camp, they told us we were moving to Niigata, a major port city on the northwest coast. Ground transportation was non-existent so we had to walk through the burnt out city of Yokohama to the train station. Before leaving, the guards warned us not to smile, saying, "We'll shoot anybody who smiles." There was nothing to smile about, because it was truly horrible. We walked through the ashes and saw charred bodies and parts of bodies; men, women, and children, young and old alike, all dead and decaying. The stench was sickening.

We transferred to Niigata by train, and on arrival, were sent to one of two camps that held about 500 men each. Our sympathetic Japanese commandant at Yokohama did not come with us, and so at Niigata we were now back to the brutalities of a petty prison camp management. They beat us for no apparent reason. It was probably just the guards' frustration at the way the war was going against them, and maybe fear for their own future.

The American navy mined Niigata's harbor, and occasionally we saw a ship hit one. Some prisoners worked on the docks, while others including myself, helped build air raid shelters. Allied planes allocated Niigata its share of bombs as well.

At Niigata, one prisoner was an American doctor from Indianapolis. He was desperately short of medicines and devised a scheme to get some. He put the word out among the Japanese guards that if any of them got a venereal disease they should come to see him. He learned they would lose pay and rank if they got caught with a venereal disease.

The first night after his offer, three guards showed up. He told them the quantities of the particular medicine he needed, and within a short time, they delivered all he asked for. The guards either had to steal it or find it on the black market, as it wasn't something in their normal supply pipeline. When the savvy doctor had specified quantities he needed, he made sure the amounts were far more than it took to cure the three guards. He had plenty left to treat a variety of ailments afflicting our guys. Yankee ingenuity had come through again.

While escape in Japan was out of the question, at Niigata we did consider one possibility that would take us off our island prison. The camp was next to an airfield where twin engine bombers routinely warmed up their engines near the fence. Three of us were working on a plan that might have had a slim chance of succeeding. Besides myself, there was my long-time fellow prisoner, Lt. Col. Walker, a pilot and former deputy air group commander, and Noel Quinn, an Australian torpedo squadron leader who had been shot down at Rabaul on Christmas Day 1943.

Quinn was downed when he hit a cable stretched across the harbor while on his way to torpedo a ship. He was constantly griping about his bad luck. Once while he was telling his story again, I said "Why are you complaining, Noel, those nice Japs sent you a cable for Christmas!"

Our escape plan involved jumping the unguarded fence and stealing one of the Japanese bombers. Usually, a single unarmed mechanic started and warmed up those planes. We figured that if we timed it right, we could scramble to the

plane and overpower him. I was to be navigator, and had made a rough map with a flight plan to Russia which I sewed in my pants. Fortunately we didn't have to test our escape plan as the war ended only a couple of weeks after we started to seriously think and work on it.

Life at Niigata continued routinely until August 15, 1945, when the camp commander called all officer prisoners together and asked, "What is an atomic bomb?" We told him we didn't know, which was the truth, but we suspected something big had happened. Indeed, unknown to us, atomic bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9 respectively..

They told us a truce was now in effect. I was so happy I thought my heart would burst. They asked us if we wanted the guards pulled out of the camp. We told them they could certainly take them out of our barracks, but not out of camp, as we feared the wrath of the local civilians. However, this fear proved to be completely unfounded.

On August 23, they supplied us with buckets of yellow paint and told us to mark the barracks roofs with large 'POW' lettering. Actually, that order came from our own forces who wanted to air drop supplies to us, and needed to know precisely where the POW camps were. We were free men at last, but still in limbo, as we would not be repatriated to our own forces for several days. As grim as my stay with my Japanese 'hosts' was, I knew where I stood. I was alive, and I could be reasonably sure Betty and my son were. There was a predictable routine, and we prisoners were a support group for each other. I learned to accept the fickle nature of my captors and hope for the best.

My wife Betty did not have this psychological luxury. I cannot imagine the depth of despair she experienced not knowing for sure, at any instant, whether I was alive or dead. How she managed to survive that first year after I was reported missing in action, and she had no word at all about my fate, I will never fully appreciate.

Fortunately, she was not alone in her grief. Our families, those of the crew of Fyrtle Myrtle, and a network of people in similar circumstances gave her support beyond measure. Until she found out I was alive, she based her hopes for me on letters from friends in the 380th Bomb Group, and other people familiar with air and military operations.

From them she received conflicting stories about exactly how many parachutes were seen emerging from our stricken plane. Betty told me afterwards that she had a very strong faith that if I had been lucky enough to be in one of those parachutes, that I would find a way to survive and come home to her. Also, from the home front's prisoner of war network, she bolstered hopes with remarkable stories of missing men subsequently confirmed alive.

When in October 1944, she received my message via Tokyo Radio's late night broadcast, it gave her morale an incredible boost. She resumed her letter writing, however slight the chance of my receiving them might be. The Japanese limited incoming letters to 24 words. These now follow along with letters of our family, the families of surviving and lost crew members, and others. They were written starting with the report of my being declared 'missing in action' by the War Department, and continue during 1944 and 1945. They poignantly portray the depths of grief, depression, and hope by those who waited valiantly at home.

Freedom and Repatriation - August - September 1945

The sudden ending of hostilities took us, and the Japanese by surprise. Harris's translations of the Japanese press could not glean the true situation that Japan faced, because it didn't get reported. About seven in morning on August 24, 1945, six U.S. Navy fighters flew over our camp at Niigata at 500 feet. A couple of hours later, while I was playing cards, I heard guys outside yelling, "Here they come, here they come." I ran out to see what was coming. The Navy fighters returned and started diving at our camp. The Japanese didn't fire on them. As they approached they started making victory rolls. It was the sweetest thing we ever saw, and we finally knew for certain the war was over.

During the next few days, American supply planes flew over and parachuted food, medical, and other supplies to us. There was one young Jap guard at Niigata who was a vicious bully. Everyone hated him. During one of those supply drops, as he was in the open compound, I saw a parachute coming down with a box heading toward him. As he was about to walk out of range, I yelled at him. He stopped just in time to get clouted on the head. It was one of the few times in my life I took sweet revenge on someone.

By then, my conversational Japanese wasn't too bad, and I could hold a polite conversation with the Japanese on a variety of everyday subjects. I found out the wartime martial spirit did not permeate the Japanese civilian population, as they harbored no personal resentment toward us. Japanese civilians would come up to us and say, "We were against the

war to begin with, so please do not think harshly of us." They worried about what the American occupation was going to mean for them.

As the truce set in, the Japanese paid us the token monthly sum in Yen that as prisoners of war we were supposed to get according to the Geneva Convention. I forget what that exact amount was, but after winning a lot more in a poker game, I had about 30,000 yen, then about $2,000.

With that, we went into the town and I bought a cow and two goats from a farmer for 3,000 yen. An American who used to work for a packing company slaughtered and butchered them and we cooked an enormous feast.

On September 1, the day before the official surrender on the USS Missouri, we visited the local town again, as I still had a lot of money left. There, a couple of Japanese businessmen told us about where the best 'house' was in town. They were very cooperative, and wanted us to be sure to remember their names as 'good fellows' for the post-war occupation. I, and three friends went to the address, and the Madam running it proved very pleasant. I told her how much money we had. She said she'd feed us, and her girls would take care of us. I said, "When you think we've spent our money, kick us out." It was a straightforward business proposition.

She gave us full value and didn't cheat us. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in a Japanese hot tub and elsewhere. I have memories of a sweet little girl about 18, who felt genuinely sorry for me being a prisoner. By then, Betty and I hadn't seen each other for 28 months. For me, it was the aftermath of a terrible war, and almost two years of beastly captivity. I have never held myself out as a saint.

After the surrender, U.S. authorities had the Japanese send representatives of all the prisoner of war camps on their home islands to the Tokyo-Yokohama area to arrange for prisoner evacuation and repatriation. Major Fellows, one of our senior POW officers, went to Yokohama accompanied by a Japanese officer. There, they visited Admiral Halsey's flagship, to plan evacuation details.

Later, I learned a funny thing happened on the ship's quarterdeck. Fellows had this Japanese officer with him, and he turned to a navy petty officer on the quarterdeck, and said offhandedly, "Take care of this guy!" The petty officer still in a wartime mentality, misunderstood, and was about to pull out his gun. He thought Fellows meant shoot him, until Fellows explained he was to, "See that he is made comfortable."

After a briefing, Halsey ordered Harold Stassen, one of his aides, to follow up with our evacuation. Stassen, who subsequently become politically famous as a perennial U.S. presidential candidate, flew up to Niigata the next day landing at the same field where we had made tentative plans to steal a plane and escape a few weeks before. I remember him coming into the camp on a Japanese truck. Everyone was standing around and he said, "Boys, I came here to get you out. We were planning to evacuate you by ship, but since the trains are running, we're sending you down to an embarkation point by train."

Stassen summoned the local Japanese mayor and told him that he wanted enough railroad cars to move 1,000 men, and he wanted them in two days. The mayor replied that it would take at least ten days to get that many cars. With a little black humor, Stassen told a translator, "You tell the mayor, unless I have those rail cars in 48 hours, I'll order an atomic bomb dropped on Niigata." The poor mayor didn't know if he was dealing with madman or not, but he got the cars there in two days.

On the train to Yokohama, I made the remark that the first American woman I saw, I was going to kiss. When we arrived and passed through the station, I saw a WAC major. I said to myself, 'Okay, McFerren, put up or shut up.' So I just grabbed her, and gave her a big kiss. Startled, she pushed me back and glared at me. Since he outranked me, I quickly explained why I kissed her. She very sweetly forgave me, and added a kiss to boot.

At Yokohama, they dispatched us all to a hospital ship for a medical checkup. If you were able to walk, talk, or otherwise seemed in one coherent piece, they flew you out to Okinawa. I qualified, and when I arrived at Okinawa, a red cross official asked, "Is there anybody you would like to contact on the island." I didn't think I knew anyone on the island, but I said casually, "I don't know, but I served with the 380th bomb group." They took us into a dining room and gave us something to eat. Twenty minutes later the official came back and said, "Do you know your group is only 14 miles from here?"

While I was a prisoner, the 380th had been battling north from Australia, through the Philippines, toward the Japanese home islands. I arranged for a car, and drove to see them. At just 125 pounds, I'd lost so much weight that none of the few remaining old timers at group headquarters recognized me at first. When they finally realized who I was, it seemed to them that one of the legends of the group had returned from the great beyond. Airmen always enshrine the memory

of their missing and fallen comrades. When the reunion was over, I finally found the group's clerk and asked, "What did you do about my promotion?" Embarrassed, he replied, "I hate to tell you, but we didn't do anything about it." I said, "Damn, that cost me plenty of money."

Coincidentally, the 380th was pressed into service flying prisoners of war to the Philippines, then the staging area to ship troops home. I flew from Okinawa to Manila in one of my old outfit's B-24s. At Manila, we joined a recovery group for prisoners of war. I was there for about a week, and although I still had my dog tags for some bungling reason, I couldn't get officially identified, or paid. I had to borrow $20 from the Red Cross Center to send a wire home to Betty to tell her I was alive, well, and free again.

After about a week of being in limbo, I started to get angry. To me, MacArthur's people there didn't give a damn about us. They seemed to give priority to prisoners of war captured in the Philippines. Finally, after having some martinis, I decided to act. Thus fortified, I went down to the nearest motor pool and asked its sergeant, "Who's the ranking American officer in the Philippines?" He said, "General Kenney." I said, "Where can I find him?" He replied, "Over at Clark Field."

I explained my situation and irritation, and asked him if I could get a car and go over and tell Kenney how some of his P.O.W. flyers are now being treated. He said, "Lieutenant, you will have a car and a driver in one minute."

It was a 40 mile drive to Clark Field, and I found Kenney's quarters with its four star insignia. I approached, knocked, entered, and was met by an aide to the general, a WAC. She said, "Lieutenant, what's your business here?" Bristling, I said, "I came over to see General Kenney." She replied, "That's out-of-the-question, he's busy, he just got back from a trip. Why don't you explain yourself and make an appointment?"

I fired back, "Bullshit, I want to see him right now, I want to see the son-of-a-bitch. I flew for him. He sent me to Balikpapan twice." By now with my voice raised, I repeated, "I want to see him right now."

Suddenly an inner door flew open and out came a couple of more aides, and General Kenney himself. Kenney asked, "What's going on here?" Before anyone could speak, I said, "General Kenney, sir, I'm a former prisoner of war. I flew with the 380th out of Manbulloo. We volunteered for the two missions to Balikpapan." Then I told him what was happening to me, adding, "All MacArthur's people seem to care about are the guys captured on Bataan and Corrigedor. I feel sorry for them, but I want to go home too."

He had a fit as he listened to the rest of my brief story. He got on the phone and spent some time talking to someone, mentioning that, "They seem to be shitting on half my boys." My escapade, and Kenney's phone call, did the trick. He turned to me and said, "I just arranged transport for you on the SS Yarmouth. You'll be sailing tomorrow afternoon. I'm sending all you guys directly home," adding, "There will be 200 nurses on board to look after you." He then asked, "Can we offer you another drink?." His aides had already gotten out some scotch. They offered me a couple of scotches, then saw to it that I got over to a dining room for some food and coffee.

When I returned to Manila, a Colonel called me in and said, "Are you the guy that went and talked to General Kenney?" I said, "Yes sir, I was." He said, "You got me in trouble. Every hour I've got to call his office and report everyone passing through who was a prisoner of war from the Air Corps." 'Tough shit,' I thought to myself.

Kenney also had his staff arrange for immediate advances against back pay owed us. In my case, that was about $4,000 for those long two years. I drew an advance of $500, and immediately lent $300 to a Norwegian merchant ship captain I was a prisoner with at Niigata. He needed it to get home. He sent it back to me several weeks after I got home. Living in a prison camp, you learn to judge a person's character pretty well. I just knew he'd return the loan.

I then sent Betty a cable telling her the name of the ship bring me home and when it was due. That in itself was an odd thing to be able to do after wartime secrecy. The next afternoon, the Yarmouth sailed with me and 3,000 other returning servicemen. During the two and a half week trip from Manila to San Francisco, I gained back 25 pounds.

In San Francisco, as the Yarmouth was tying up to the pier I quickly found Betty in the crowd. I noticed a woman with a prominent feather in her hat, and it was her. Whether clothes, perfume, or feathers, she always had a flair for attracting attention. Her aunt and Uncle, Sadie and Clayton Garvey, who had been like parents to us, were with her.

We stared and waved at each other for an awkward two hours before the gangway dropped, and I was able to get off the ship and hold her in my arms. We had not spoken a word to each other since we parted two and a half years before. My two-year old son, Bill III, was not at the pier that day. Betty had left him in the care of Louise Farnum at Santa Ana as Cush was then commanding officer of the Army Air Base there. Clayton and Sadie took Betty and I out to their house.

Once there, they excused themselves saying they had some shopping and errands to run, and would be gone several hours.

I reported to the San Francisco Veterans Hospital the following day for a thorough checkup, which I passed with flying colors. After that, I called Cush at Santa Ana, advising him I had orders to report there. I suspect he had something to do with those orders. When I got to Santa Ana the next day, I finally met my son. He seemed awfully big, and didn't quite know what to make of his long lost daddy.

As soon as I could, I wrote letters to the families of the men on Fyrtle Myrtle who were lost. They still did not know the details of what happened to their sons after two years. Their heartbreaking replies, and letters Betty, family, and friends wrote when they knew I was free.

Heritage and Hindsight

My family has probably been involved in every war that the United States pursued since it's founding. On my maternal side, I am descended from Connecticut's Welles Family, which included Thomas Welles, one of that state's colonial governors in 1655. I haven't checked the record to find out how many Welleses were rebels or Tories during the Revolutionary War, but they were probably involved on either or both sides.

Another maternal family ancestor, Gideon Welles, was Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. During World War II, Sumner Welles was Franklin Roosevelt's Under Secretary of State and my mother's cousin. Thus, I am a scion of warriors and diplomats on my maternal side.

My paternal side is Scots-Irish and more obscure. Records show many McFerrens in Northern Ireland's County Down, part of the British plantation colony established there over 300 years ago. My grandfather Jacob McFerren, left North Carolina for central Illinois after the Civil War. The story told me was that he did so, 'a step ahead of the sheriff, and only two bits in his pocket.' In Illinois, he married well, inheriting his first wife's estate when she died. In the late 1870s, he moved to Hoopeston, then very good farm country. There, he bought farmland around the town for $3.00 an acre. That's how my immediate family found themselves principals of a bank and a vegetable canning company in Hoopeston by the 1880s.

My grandfather's only known children were my father and uncle, William and Donald McFerren, who remained life-long partners in the various Hoopeston family enterprises. As boys, they went to Hotchkiss, a Connecticut prep school, and both managed to get kicked out for some harmless but outrageous capers. During World War I, they were balloonists in the Army.

My father married Marjorie Welles in 1913, and I am their only son, born at home in Hoopeston, March 11, 1915. Following my family heritage, I too, went to Hotchkiss graduating in 1933, along with classmate Potter Stewart who became a U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Potter was also my classmate at Yale. We bootlegged hard cider on the Yale campus together and kept in touch over the years. At Yale, I studied economics, greek and latin classics, comparative religion, and earned a bachelor's degree.

In hindsight, some war wounds leave physical scars, others are more subtle. It's been over 50 years since the war ended, but I still have the occasional nightmare recalling the terror of the bombing of Yokohama and Tokyo where I was a prisoner of war. I think similar memories affect most of us World War II combat veterans. However, we were conditioned to repress our war traumas. We came home to bands, bunting, and parades. It was the 'good war,' and no one suggested that any of us would suffer from a 'post-war syndrome' that might impact our lives and families forever after.

When I returned to the States the first week of October 1945, I was sent home for 'temporary duty' until my discharge as a captain in April 1946. I started having terrible nightmares about the beatings and bombings, and spent a good part of the rest of the year trying to resolve the feelings simmering within me.

The carefree, wild, pre-combat days of I and Betty's intoxicating love had seasoned with the passage of the two traumatic years. We had to become reacquainted with each other. Of course, we still loved each other, but now we faced different challenges and responsibilities.

We had a son to care for and raise. The next year, my father died suddenly after a short illness. This sadness was mitigated by the birth of our daughter, Mary Jeanne. This joy also meant there would be no rest for the weary. The

responsibility of having to earn a living and help raise a family, precluded any respite from the pain of the prior two and a half years. I had to hit the ground running.

We remained in California, and I went back to work in the food business. My family had sold their interest in the canning company in Hoopeston, and I took a salesman's job with Stokley Van Camp, the company that bought them out. Unfortunately, while calling on west coast grocery clients, I also had to be away from my family a lot.

I stayed with Stokley for two years, then heard about an opportunity with Uncle Ben's Converted Rice. I became its district manager for 11 western states, and also took advantage of an invitation to buy some initial stock shares in the company.

During the next seven years I continued to have to spend a lot of time travelling and making sales calls. While visiting Denver, I got to know a food broker by the name of Bill Snider. It turned out he flew one of the fighters that took part in the Yokohama raids when I was a prisoner there. He convinced me that being a food broker was a better opportunity than working for a food processor. In 1956 I sold my Uncle Ben's shares. With the proceeds we moved to Denver, bought half his food brokerage business, and built the house Betty and I still live in today.

Three years later, I bought Snider out, and reorganized a new food brokerage company with two minority-interest partners. We did well over the years, and in 1979 I retired and sold my majority interest to them.

While I was building my business in the 1960s and 1970s, I also got involved with politics. I helped raise a lot of money for what I thought were worthy candidates in local, state, and national races. As I wrote Betty during the war, I thought it important to identify and support candidates for office who would make an effort to change things. People who would work toward creating a political environment where my son, and his generation, would not have to fight in a war like I did.

Personally, however, the many years of drinking started to catch up with me on the home front. Besides having a few drinks to sedate my war memories, a few drinks were considered an acceptable part of business entertaining. I pursued business and drinking with gusto, not realizing I had managed to tune out both Betty and my family when I returned home.

In 1958, Betty suggested I look into Alcoholics Annonymous. I joined the program, but went back to drinking after 10 months. For many years I just kept my drinking away from the family. I don't think hiding it fooled anyone, and problems resurfaced on the home front. Thankfully, Betty insisted I again seek help, and I rejoined their program in the late 1970s, and haven't found it necessary to touch a drop since.

Our son Bill grew up, went to college, and became a U.S. Navy pilot in Vietnam. He flew the P-3 Orion, a multi-engined anti-submarine aircraft. He served with distinction, and left the service honorably when his tour was over. Now, he pursues his own interests, and lives not far from us in Colorado. After college, our daughter Mary Jeanne married, and she and her husband ultimately moved to Colorado. They regularly bring our grandchildren down from the mountain foothills to visit us.

In 1992, at the same Lowry Air Force Base I passed through on my way to war in 1943, I belatedly was presented a Silver Star decoration for my war service. I was recommended for one when repatriated, but it never got processed in the post-war confusion and euphoria.

What I have chronicled is our family's wartime experience. It's probably not too different from many of our contemporaries. It's a tiny slice of the history of our age and generation. After 53 years, we are still a family. We didn't 'dream' about a good life in America. We defined it ourselves, and worked for it. Along the way, we've accepted our failures, along with our successes. When Betty and I married, it was for the long haul. To us, commitment to ourselves, family, and friends are what's most important in life. Happily, we carry on.